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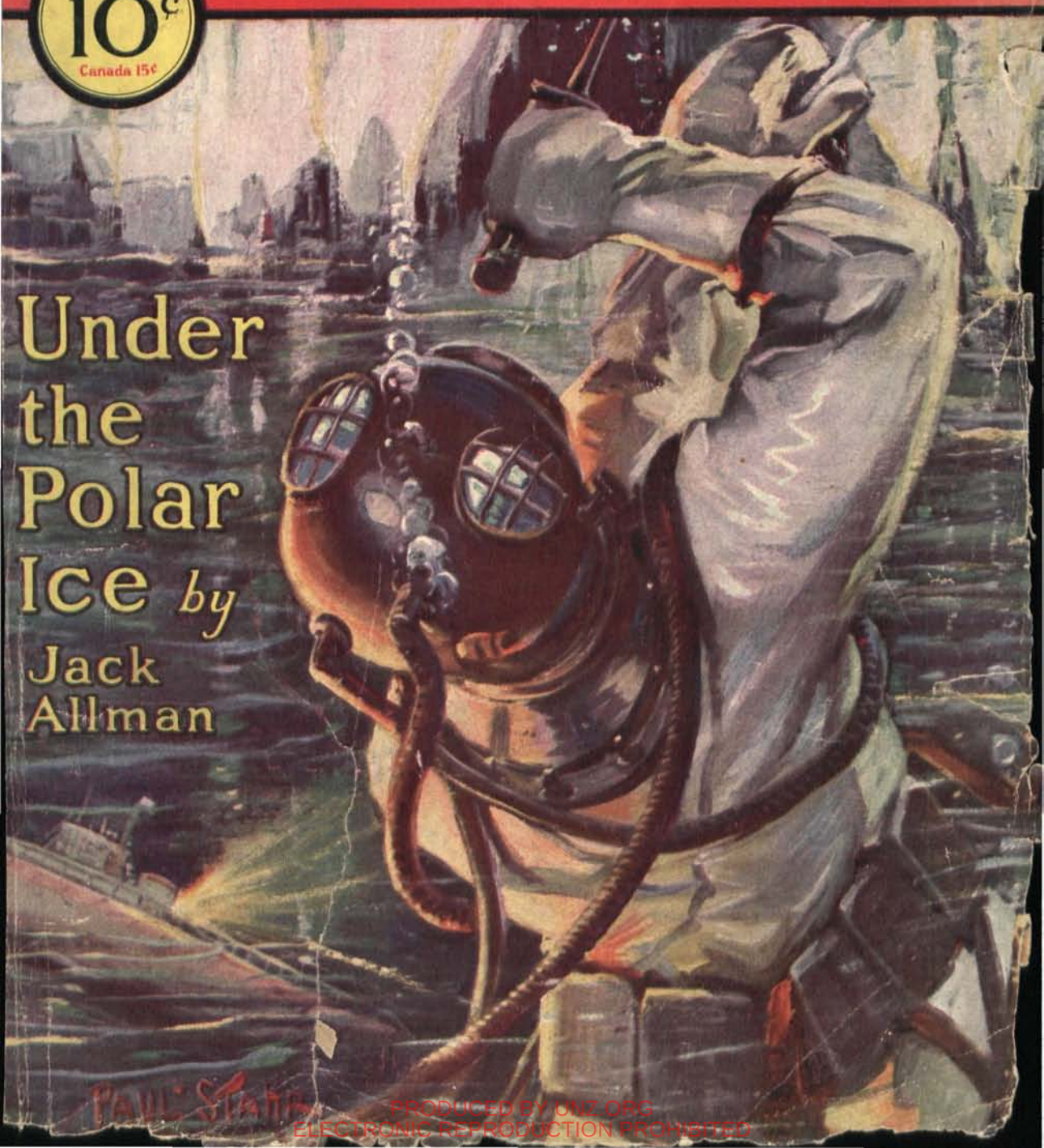

Under the Polar Ice by Jack Allman

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NOBODY PAID ME $1000

"I GUESS you'd call this a testimonial all right, but nobody paid me a thousand dollars for it like they do those society women. I'll be lucky if I get an extra bone. After all it's only a story about my love for the boss, and I don't suppose it's worth much.

"I was just a puppy in a kennel when the boss came and took me away. It was pretty hard leaving my mother, but when I saw the boss' plain, kind face and felt his big, gentle hands, I knew that he and I were going to get along.

"Well, life was simply wonderful. All day long there were cats to chase. Any number of them. I don't think anything's more fun than putting the fear of death into a fat, complacent cat. They say, of course, that it can be overdone, but I doubt it.

"Every night when the boss would come home we'd romp down to the sea and he'd talk to me. Once or twice he let me take a snap at that nasty Chow across the street. A swell guy. And on week-ends we'd go out in his boat with some of his cronies. At night they'd sit around the cabin light and talk about the places they'd been, places they'd like to be, and yachts they'd sailed, and how some day they'd buy a big schooner and go off to the South Sea Islands and grow old in a fig leaf.

" 'A beautiful hand-painted chance you'll have of getting to the South Seas,' laughed one of the boss' friends, 'with the market the way it is, and Elizabeth Carstairs waiting next door. Why, Charlie, my boy, within another six months you'll be doing the lock-step up the dark halls of matrimony. You'll be home thumbing seed catalogues under the eagle eye of the adored one, while stout fellows like myself are braving the raging main.'

" 'She's a wonderful girl!' answered the boss. 'You are simply envious.'

"I guess she was a wonderful girl all right. And beautiful too, with that kind of reserved stately beauty you see in Massachusetts women. The boss adored her. I can't say as much for myself. I would have liked to yap at her heels. She seemed kind of shallow to me—always fussing about little things.

"Suddenly she began to act sort of distant to the boss. They didn't kiss as often as they used to. He seemed to annoy her although he was just as sweet as he could be to her. Naturally, this cold attitude of hers bothered him; he used to sit with his head in his hands wondering what was wrong.

"And at first I didn't have the slightest inkling myself. But later I knew what the trouble was. Or at least I thought I did. After all, a dog's keenest sense is that of smell, and there could be no doubt that the boss' breath wasn't beyond reproach.

"I am only a dog but I know that a man can't get away with a thing like that. The ads say that even a man's best friend won't tell him, but believe me the only reason I didn't tell him was because *I couldn't*. I tried hard enough, but whimpers and barks don't convey much.

"It wasn't long after that she broke the engagement—and his heart, too, I guess. He never went anywhere—not even to his boat. Just moped.

"Then one night he got wise. I like to think I helped him see himself as others—including Miss Carstairs—saw him. It happened this way:

"There was a magazine lying open on the floor where it had fallen from the rack. Face up was one of those Listerine ads. Well, sir, I just went up and put my paw on it and barked till I was hoarse.

" 'For the love of Christmas, keep quiet,' he exclaimed, 'and get off that magazine.'

"Then he picked it up!

"Something made him read it. He read it all the way through.

"He must have taken the hint because he and Miss Carstairs have patched it up. The wedding's next month. And now, if you'll excuse me, there's a little cat trouble outside I'll have to attend to."

Halitosis (unpleasant breath) is the unforgivable fault in social and business life. Everyday conditions capable of causing it may arise in even normal mouths.

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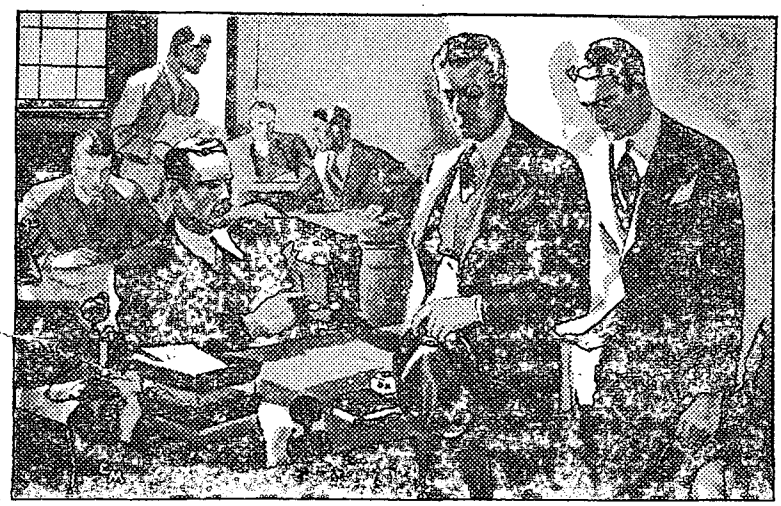

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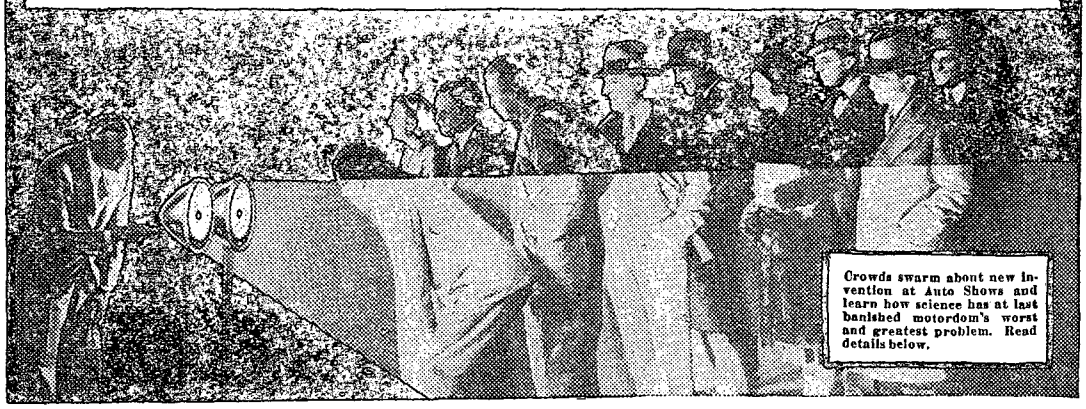
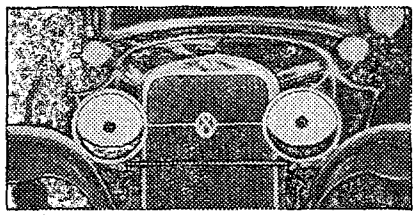
DANGEROUS DIMMING ENDED.. Road Light Doubled!



Crowds swarm about new invention at Auto Shows and learn how science has at last banished motordom's worst and greatest problem. Read details below.

AMAZING INVENTION FITS ANY HEADLIGHT... Revolutionizes Night Driving!

At last! Night driving suddenly becomes actually SAFER than day! At one sweep, a tiny, inexpensive invention banishes glare yet doubles road illumination! Cuts through every light on the road! Fits any car. Use coupon QUICK for liberal FREE TEST OFFER!



Perfect-O-Lite even looks absolutely unique and entirely different. Every sale brings dozens more. It's the greatest "self-advertiser" ever known.

IT is a well-known fact that motor car manufacturers have solved every big problem except one. As soon as the sun goes down at night, the highways of America break forth into a constant, rushing stream of "dimming and damning." Speed is cut down one-third to one-half. Every Monday morning finds the highways littered with broken glass, wrecks, cars in the ditch, overturned, shattered against telephone posts. Every man who ever groped dizzily down the highway in traffic at night knows the horrible sensation of being half-blinded by cars on his left, unable to see the ditch on his right, his own lights seeming dim and shadowy and practically worthless. Now, in a twinkling, this curse of night driving is lifted completely and *inexpensively* from the shoulders of the entire motoring world!

FITS ANY HEADLIGHT

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The secret of this new light is in the kind of "beam" or "ray" that it throws. Instead of ordinary light, this new invention pours a solid beam of double-reflected or "infused" light down the entire roadway. Shows up ditches at the side, as well as distant objects, absolutely clear, without the usual flickering "shadows." Space here limits further discussion of the facts.

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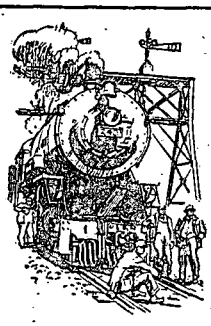

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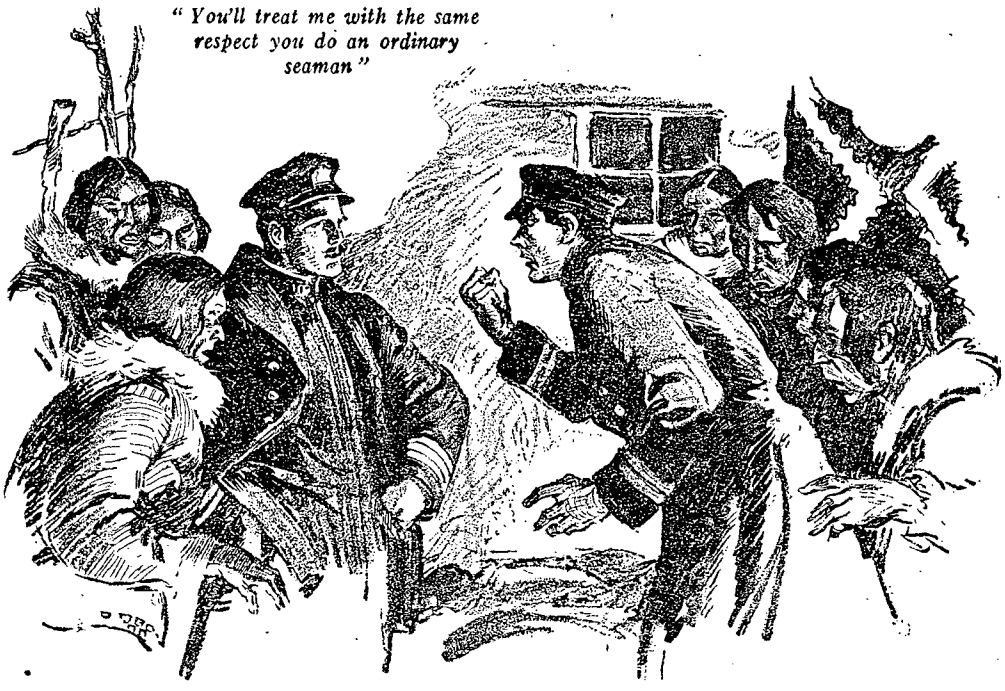
VOLUME 221 SATURDAY, JUNE 13, 1931 NUMBER 5



"You'll treat me with the same respect you do an ordinary seaman"

Under the Polar Ice

Lieut. Jerry Manning, Navy observer aboard the submarine bound into the dark waters under the Arctic ice-pack, meets human perils as deadly as those of the unknown world he is entering

By JACK ALLMAN

Author of "The Bell of the Lutine," "Antidote," etc.

CHAPTER I.

WARNED.

JUST north of the Yokohama-Seattle steamer route, and almost halfway between Japan and the evergreen shores of Puget Sound, the huge V-type submarine pulled lazily at her anchor in the sheltered waters of Dutch Harbor.

A mellow Arctic sun bathed Unalaska and the neighboring islands of the Aleutian Archipelago in the golden glow of late afternoon. A soft breeze,

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blowing in from Akutan Pass, was tinctured with the pungent odor of the seaweed that lay in great windrows along the beach.

Raucous gulls wheeled in circles over the carcass of a dead whale grounded on the rocky shore of the landlocked harbor. The beat of a thousand wings drummed the air as great flocks of sea pigeons darted here and there, shattering the vast Alaska stillness with their shrill cries.

"There she comes!"

The shout echoed out over the quiet waters, and in another minute the big sub's crew were lined along the port rail, all eyes trained on the narrow entrance to the bay. The officers hurriedly gathered on the chariot bridge, while directly over their heads a signalman balanced expertly on the periscope housing while rapidly semaphoring the commander's message of welcome to a much smaller undersea boat that was cutting a foaming path in their direction. An American flag whipped the air above the stranger's low stern, but the absence of a commission pennant marked her as a civilian craft.

The youngest of the Navy sub's officers, a tall, good-looking chap in his middle twenties, stood intently watching the approaching boat. He crushed his cap against the bridge coaming with tense hands, while his clear blue eyes danced and an excited flush added to the ruddiness of his cheeks. The breeze whipped a shock of soft brown hair over his high forehead as he joined lustily in a cheer that went up from the government vessel.

Jerry Manning, lieutenant, junior grade, was almost uncontrollably happy. For two months now he had been on this strategic submarine base survey in Alaskan waters. His active nature had chafed under the routine work, and this was the end of it. For there came the expedition boat. To-morrow would see him launched on the great adventure.

When the Navy Department had accepted Samuel Drake's invitation to put an officer observer in his polar expedition, Jerry had been one of the first to volunteer. It was Drake's idea to go under the Arctic ice cap with a submarine and search for land in the million square miles of unexplored ocean lying between Alaska and the Pole.

Jerry's youth had been against his chances of being accepted, but when he volunteered he made it plain that his boyhood training along Alaska's northern shores, where he was raised, would be of value. The weight of his argument had overcome the handicap of youth and he was on the eve of an adventure, the very thoughts of which made his blood leap with delight.

"BELIEVE me, Jerry, I don't envy you your trip in that little sardine can," said the officer beside him. "Especially," he added, "with Phil Crawford in command."

"What's the matter with Crawford? He's one of the best civilian pig-boat men in the country, isn't he?" asked Jerry.

"Oh, I guess he knows his subs, all right. Too well, in fact," grinned the officer.

"What do you mean, too well?"

"Well, if he hadn't tried to fool the Navy he might have put Drake's deal across. You know, Drake designed this small type sub that he claimed to be more practical than these big twenty-five-hundred-ton V-boats. He sold the gold braid in Washington on the idea and they made a test run in San Francisco Bay. I was at Mare Island

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at the time and it was our understanding that if this first boat of his lived up to specifications, he was to get a contract for a flock of 'em."

"What happened? There were a lot of rumors flying around." Jerry was interested.

"Well," confided the officer knowingly, "I got the low-down on it. Crawford was Drake's trial captain and he took the Navy Inspector of Machinery out and put the tub through her paces. She performed like a lulu till the I. M. told him to balance her at forty feet. Crawford dropped her to the required depth, but wasn't sure he could hold her stationary, so when no one was looking he closed the depth-gauge cocks."

"Shut 'em off, huh?" asked Jerry, in amazement.

"I'll say he did, and there she stood reading forty feet—steady as a clock. The I. M. was just about to put his O. K. on her when—wham! She settles on the bottom in twenty fathom, the gauges still reading forty. Well, they caught Crawford at his little trick and turned Drake's design down cold."

"That doesn't mean that the boat's no good," reasoned Jerry. "You know yourself that it's a matter of holding your breath to keep a can at a set depth without headway and the use of your horizontal rudders."

"Sure I do. So did Crawford. The way I get it, Drake never did find out exactly why his design was turned down, but you can bet your life Crawford knows. That's the reason I say I wouldn't want to sail under him. He's got an anti-Navy complex that amounts almost to a phobia. He's death on anything pertaining to our Service, and you're in for a sweet time." He put a friendly hand on Jerry's shoulder. "One thing you can bank on, though, old man," he said. "Drake is going to have that sub of his tuned like a fiddle. This expedition is his answer to the brass hats in Washington. He's going to prove the practicability of that wagon of his if it takes all his millions."

"And I'm perfectly willing to help him do it." Jerry turned and started down the bridge ladder as the small boat swung alongside.

"Well, it's your funeral, not mine," offered the other officer. Then, as an afterthought, he added: "Between you and me and the gyro-compass, Jerry, you can take that literally. I share the opinion of the other boys when I say that I don't think you've got one chance in a thousand of getting out from under that ice if anything goes wrong."

"Thanks for the encouragement," grinned Jerry. "Let's hope nothing goes wrong." He swung to the deck just as the civilian boat made fast.

THOUGH Jerry had never seen him before, he recognized the tall figure that came aboard as Crawford. He rather admired the captain's natty appearance. He was as tall as Jerry, a bit over six feet. Straight and trim with wide, flat shoulders and a lean waist. His blue nautical uniform fitted him like a kid glove, and his peaked cap sat on his handsome head at a devil-may-care angle.

The curly black hair at his temples was trimmed close, as was his small mustache. His skin bore a healthy tan, and he looked straight into the world with sharp gray eyes. His mouth was the only thing that detracted from his appearance. It was straight, with no indent at the corners, and the lips were tight against his teeth, and thin.

He was quick in his movements and his speech. He presented Mr. Drake's

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compliments to the commander and explained that the designer was ill; that they would stop only long enough to take the Navy's observer aboard.

A Filipino mess boy was sent for Jerry's things, and in another minute his shipmates were shaking his arm out of its socket—slapping him fondly on the back—offering bantering advice and wishing him the best of luck. His informative friend of the bridge put his mouth close to Jerry's ear.

"Remember what I told you," he whispered. "Watch Crawford. He's bad medicine."

"Thanks, I'll keep that in mind," laughed the young officer, swinging aboard the other boat with his duffle. When they had been introduced Crawford had asked that he keep his baggage down, with the result that Jerry now stood on the bridge of the small boat with only a light sea bag containing his personal belongings.

"All set? Got everything?" asked Crawford.

"Right," answered Jerry.

The captain took his place on the bridge and gave orders to cast off. The raucous blast of a klaxon echoed up from the depths of the sub, and the big motors churned astern. More klaxons. More rumbling below, and the hoarse roar of the Diesels drowned out the cheers from the V-boat as the expedition craft swung in a wide, graceful arc up the bay.

CHAPTER II.

TWO MEN CLASH.

JERRY filled his lungs with the clean fresh air and muttered a happy "Oh, boy!" beneath his breath as the boat slipped out between the forbidding headlands of the harbor and stuck her nose due north into the choppy waves of Bering Sea. Ahead of him lay the unknown. Before him adventure loomed large and inviting. Here was life worth while.

Crawford stepped up beside him. "If you'll grab your gear, I'll show you to your quarters, Lieutenant Manning."

"Right." Jerry snapped his eyes to the captain's face. He couldn't be sure, but it seemed to him that there was an unnecessary emphasis on his title. His face flushed suddenly as he saw Crawford's eyes, with a half smile, fastened on the brand-new, shiny half stripe. It contrasted boldly with the somewhat tarnished full band of ensign that circled the cuff of his working uniform—a dead give-away that he was new to his present rank.

He followed Crawford down the conning tower hatch and threw his duffle on the empty bunk in the forward battery compartment which the skipper indicated was to be his.

Jerry saw that the torpedo room had been partitioned off into four small cabins, two on each side of a narrow corridor. It was to one of these staterooms that Crawford led the way. "Mr. Drake 'll want to meet you," he said.

They entered, and the captain introduced him.

Samuel Drake was a big man. Tall and thick, with a barrel-like body and heavy limbs. A shock of almost red hair, liberally sprinkled with gray, covered a massive head. His face was big and full, with a large resolute mouth. His whole countenance was one of power and force, but it was in the wide-set eyes that looked out from under shaggy brows that Jerry saw the determination and purpose that had prompted this man of ample wealth to

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leave a life of achievement behind and outfit a trip that, besides its scientific value to mankind, would prove to critical Navy officers that the Drake type submarine was a practical undersea boat.

Despite the ravages of a week's seasickness, Drake had a face that was still able to break out into an engaging smile, and as he sat there in a heavy lounging robe Jerry felt an instant liking for the man.

The usual amenities over, Crawford appropriated the only vacant chair in the room, while Jerry stood with his back to the door.

"I hope your commander wasn't offended at our not accepting his invitation to come aboard," said Drake. "You see, we want to get to Point Barrow by the fifteenth of August, and time is short. I'm not feeling any too well, and my daughter"—he nodded his head toward the adjoining cabin—"is suffering from *mal-de-mer* even more."

"Your daughter?" Wrinkles cut across Jerry's forehead. "So we are putting in to Nome, are we?" he asked.

"Nome? No. Why do you say that?" Drake seemed puzzled.

"Well, you certainly aren't taking your daughter up under the ice, are you?" Jerry's face showed his surprise.

"Well, I—I—" Drake stammered. "I realize it's no trip for a woman, and I've tried to dissuade her, but she's made up her mind." He shook his head solemnly.

"Why, Mr. Drake," argued Jerry, "this trip is going to be plenty tough, even if everything goes as planned, but who knows what we may be up against before we get back out from under the floe? What if we should have to take to the ice? What would you do with a woman then? Why, it would be out of the question."

He looked in amazement from one to the other of the two men, failing to understand how either of them could possibly think of such a thing.

"We're equipped for every contingency," spoke up Crawford.

"Well, I was raised just east of Point Barrow," said Jerry. "I know that Arctic ice pack from experience, and believe me, it's no place for a woman. Even the Eskimos leave their women folks at home when they start out over the ice fields."

"I know that you know the ice conditions, Manning," offered Drake. "That's the reason I'm grateful to the Navy Department for giving us the advantage of your knowledge." He drew a long breath. "You may understand the vagaries of an Arctic ice pack, but you don't know my daughter."

"As I understand it," snapped Crawford, turning to Jerry, "your position on this expedition is that of observer. Such details as don't concern you can be safely left to Mr. Drake."

The knob of the light steel door jabbed Jerry in the back as he wheeled to answer Crawford's insult. He stepped nimbly aside to permit the opening of the door. The cloud of sudden anger that swept over his face at the captain's remark gave way to a look of surprise.

IN the narrow doorway stood a girl about twenty years old. Over her shoulders, and contrasting vividly with her green padded-silk dressing gown, her auburn hair cascaded almost to her waist. A small white hand, with long tapering fingers, clasped the folds of her gown at her throat. Her small

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rounded chin was held high in a wrathful attitude, and her brown eyes, feminine counterparts of her father's, swept angrily over Jerry.

"Connie," said Drake, rising, "this is Lieutenant Manning." And then to Jerry: "My daughter Constance, lieutenant."

Jerry nodded his acknowledgment of the introduction. The girl's rapid speech precluded anything so formal as a bow or a verbal salutation.

"I couldn't help hearing," she was saying, with a nod toward the ventilating screen in the dividing bulkhead. "I wish, father, that you would tell Lieutenant Manning that I am going on this trip whether he likes it or not. The responsibility is not his. He can get off at Point Barrow if he wants to. We don't need the Navy to help us, anyway."

Jerry suppressed a smile at her earnestness.

"Now, now, Connie — you run along. I'll have a little talk with Lieutenant Manning," placated Drake.

"Then tell him that I'm just as important to the expedition as he is," she told her father; and, then, turning to Crawford, said: "Please Philip, have some of the men come and wipe down the walls of my room again. It's sweating, as you call it; dripping all over everything."

"Getting into colder water," explained Crawford. "I'll take care of that right away."

"PLEASE try and overlook anything Connie may say, lieutenant," asked Drake after the others had left. He listened till he heard their voices in the other room, and then added in an undertone: "She lost her mother when she was a child, and I guess I've kind of spoiled her." Again he shook his head. "She's terribly headstrong."

Jerry agreed, in his mind. He assured himself that if she were his daughter she'd get a spanking.

"Well, I'd rather have her that way than one of these brainless butterflies," Drake added. He leaned across the small table and shook a thick finger in emphasis. "What do you think that girl did? Well, I'll tell you. When she first learned that I was planning this trip she took a course in journalism and typing. She appointed herself historian. She's certain of success, and has inspired me with confidence since preparations got under way. She named this boat the Ultima Thule, and she says that if we don't reach the ultima Thule of all explorers—if we don't get to that most inaccessible spot of all, the middle of a million square miles of ice between Alaska and the North Pole—she hopes we don't get back. Connie is the kind that can't face failure."

Jerry saw the light of pride in Drake's eyes and resigned himself to having a woman on the trip. With Drake he discussed the possibilities of finding land, feeling the same enthusiasm that had actuated the designer. Jerry had his own reasons for thinking there was something in the old whalers' reports that tide action indicated some sort of a barrier to the northward.

As a child he had watched the geese, swans, brant, and other water fowl leave the mainland in May. In September he had seen them come back with fledglings. Surely they didn't nest on the ice. No plane or dirigible had yet flown over any part except the eastern edge of the great pack. What lay in that vast unexplored area was simply a matter of conjecture.

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"What a wonderful thing it would be if there was some place up there where a meteorological station could be established," said Drake enthusiastically. "With intercontinental air travel an assured fact, advance weather predictions are invaluable."

"A landing field up there would be worth something, too," agreed Jerry. "Do you know that the great circle route—the shortest distance between New York and Japan—runs north of the Arctic Circle clear across Alaska?"

CHAPTER III.

A HASTY DIVE.

AFTER leaving Drake, Jerry hunted up Crawford. He found him in the central control compartment, the very heart of the ship. Jerry waited until Crawford left to go aft to the engine room. What he had to say would be better not heard by the two men on the diving rudders and air manifold.

The after battery compartment, lying between the central control and the two five-hundred-horse-power Diesels, was deserted. Jerry stopped the captain there.

"Crawford," he said in sharp, brittle tones, "I didn't like the attitude you took up there in Drake's cabin."

The skipper wheeled. With legs wide-spread, hands on hips, and chin thrust forward, he looked the lieutenant over from head to foot and back again. Then he said slowly, deliberately:

"Oh! You didn't like my attitude, huh?"

"No, I didn't!" snapped Jerry. "I'm not trying to plan this trip, or anything of the kind. I'm here to report on the practicability of the Drake submarine, that's all. From now on, if you want any advice about the polar ice pack, ask for it. I've told you what I think of taking a woman out there, and you seem to think I'm sticking my bill in where it isn't wanted. All right!

"Assign me to a watch. I'm not going to try and steal any of your thunder. As far as I'm concerned, you can have all the responsibility, and I am only putting myself under you because I see that it will keep down friction. There's no place for dissension on a trip of this kind."

There was nothing undecided about the manner in which Jerry got it off his chest.

For a full minute Crawford met the lieutenant's level eyes. A half sneer, half snarl curled his thin lips. Anger, well controlled but latently vicious, blazed in his steel-gray eyes. His handsome face hardened like chiselled granite.

"Take the graveyard deck watch," he ordered, turning on his heel.

EACH night Jerry stood on the bridge, holding the course laid out by Crawford, while the Ultima Thule, her engines tuned like sewing machines, plowed along with a bone in her teeth at fourteen knots.

In five days they had reached the straits, and after slipping between the Diomede Islands and Cape Prince of Wales she headed up into the Arctic Ocean. Another couple of days now and they would refuel from the oil that had been sent to Point Barrow the season before.

"A feel of ice in the air," said Jerry to his helmsman the first night after they had left Bering Strait behind.

"*Ja!* More lak winter as soommer," agreed the man at the wheel.

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Jerry had been pleasantly surprised to find Erik Wikstrom on his watch. Erik had been civilian instructor at the Newport Naval Diving School when he took the course. Now he was signed on as a deep-sea diver, but like other specialists of the hand-picked crew he stood a regular trick.

During the long night watches Erik talked a great deal. He had had a run-in with Crawford the first day out of San Francisco, and for that reason Jerry discounted his story of the captain's getting so excited that he nearly ran down a Matson liner in Golden Gate; he put it down as grudge talk, and let it go in one ear and out of the other. But there were a few things that the diver said which were destined to stick in his mind.

"Crawford's engaged to the old man's daughter—gonna get married when they get back—plans all made—Drake's gonna make his new son-in-law a member of the firm."

These things, that Jerry would not have admitted disturbed him, were running through his mind as he stood facing the stiff breeze that swept down from the Arctic through the faint dusk that was Alaska's summer nighttime.

Suddenly he straightened, stared ahead through the spray that broke over the sub's pointed nose. The ice field cut straight across the blackness of sea, less than a mile away. He gave orders for slow ahead and sent for the captain.

Crawford and Drake both came on deck. The former bustled around, giving orders, while Drake stood shivering in the sharp wind that brushed the ice ahead.

"Didn't think we'd hit ice here at this time of the year," said Crawford to the designer.

Drake rubbed his hands and turned up the collar of his coat. He looked over at Jerry.

"Is it common to find a pack this far south, Manning?" he asked.

"Occasionally a north wind will drive a sheet down against the cape. That looks like Lisburne over there on the right." Jerry indicated the dark outline of land to the east.

"How wide would this ice barrier be?" asked Drake through chattering teeth. The wind cut through their clothes like knives.

"Busted off at a tide crack, is my guess," hazarded Jerry. "Maybe twenty—thirty miles wide. There'll be open water the other side of it."

"Well, let's hope she doesn't delay us too much. Time's getting short." Drake dropped down through the hatch. "Too cold for me up here."

CRAWFORD had taken the helm and had sent Erik below. He and Jerry were the only persons topside as the sub crept up closer to the ice floe.

"Sure that's Cape Lisburne?" asked the skipper.

"Looks like it," said Jerry. He rested his glasses on one of the two heavy I-beams that rose from the bow and bent themselves over the top of the short conning tower like inverted sled runners. The periscope, which could be raised or lowered at will, was down. "I don't know for sure," he said after gazing intently through the binoculars. "Might be Point Hope. Light's too poor to tell for sure."

"Well, if that's Lisburne we can turn off northeast by north as soon as we're under the ice for a mile or so. The coast is fairly straight from Lisburne to Barrow." Crawford sounded the klaxon that would send the men to their diving stations.

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"Better make sure," suggested Jerry. "If that's Point Hope we'll have to continue due north for another fifty miles before we can swing toward Barrow."

The rumble of the Diesels changed into the smooth hum of the electric motors as the switch-over was made in preparation for diving.

"According to the log, that should be Lisburne," grunted Crawford. "Time's too short for an observation."

"Don't forget, we've been bucking this wind since early yesterday afternoon." Jerry went down the ladder after the skipper. "We may be off our course. Better make sure."

"Never mind what I'd better do," snapped Crawford. "You're relieved, Manning. I'm taking over the rest of your watch. I'll run her up under this barrier." He slammed the hatch cover shut and threw over the locking lever.

"Take her down to thirty and hold her there," he bellowed. The slush of water over her deck answered his order. "Half ahead," he called. The whine of the big motors steadied to a monotonous rhythm. They were under the ice—nosing their way through the dark at five miles an hour.

Jerry went to his bunk and sat talking with the meteorologist-oceanographer and the zoölogist who, together with the navigation officer, shared the forward battery compartment with him. The two scientists made copious notes in their bulky diaries. Their reactions to their first dive were something to write about. It was like a small boy's first visit to a circus.

EYES closed, Jerry lay back on his bunk. Coming in from the fresh air had made him drowsy. He was only half conscious of the voices of Drake and his daughter as they drifted back from the open door of the small stateroom against the forward bulkhead. Then another noise cut in on his drowsing. He sat up with a start.

At regular intervals the sonic depth finder sent out its vibrant growl. With increasingly short periods the echoes came back from the ocean bottom. A frown cut deep furrows in Jerry's forehead as he cocked an ear to catch the sound. That last squawk came back pretty fast—they were certainly close to the bottom! He swung to his feet and made his way to the control room.

Crawford was giving orders to the man on the depth rudders to bring her up against the ice, at the same time cutting her down to "slow ahead," as Jerry entered the compartment.

There was a light bump overhead as the sled runners came up against ice pan. The blat of the sonic finder and the echo from the bottom were now almost one sound. The space between the floating ice and the ocean floor was getting very narrow. Jerry saw the quick beads of sweat form on Crawford's face.

"Looks like we're running out of water," said Jerry.

The words were hardly out of his mouth when, with a grinding crunch, the sub wedged herself between the ice and the sea floor. She was proceeding slowly, but even then the sudden stop was enough to throw them off their balance. A sailor cursed in the tiny galley, cut into the corner of the after battery compartment. From up forward came the thin scream of a woman's voice, with Drake's deep bass for an echo.

Crawford turned a white face with flashing eyes and thin, tight lips to Jerry.

"Looks like you've given us a bum

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steer on this native coast of yours," he said.

"What do you mean—I gave you a bum steer?" Jerry snapped.

"Just what I said. You said that was Lisburne back there. I took your word for it, and now we're aground."

Jerry threw a quick look at the compass. Northeast by north. He whipped his eyes back to the captain's sweating face. So that was the game, huh? Going to tie it onto him! Crawford had set the course for Barrow on the chance that they were north of the cape. The headland they had seen had been Point Hope, after all. They had run ashore.

"Crawford," he gritted, and his words came from a tense, outthrust jaw. "You can't pin this on me." He pointed to the swimming disk of the compass. "I told you I wasn't sure—that you'd better take an observation."

"Don't tell me you didn't say that was Lisburne." The captain stepped forward, his fists raised, his upper lip quivering on one corner in a canine snarl. They stood facing each other in the tight silence. The motors were stopped. The quiet was oppressive.

"What's the matter here?" Drake's bulky figure filled the doorway. Crawford explained that due to Manning's error in locating themselves by the coast line, they had turned for Point Barrow too soon and were aground in shallow water, probably close to shore. Jerry opened his mouth to defend himself, but was cut off by the captain's curt:

"Shut up!"

DRAKE shook with anger. Here they were, hardly started, and in a jam already. He saw the fruits of his labors destroyed without a chance to prove the worth of his boat. He raved and stormed, venting his anger on the unfortunate Jerry, as the submarine held fast against reversed motors. They were tightly wedged now.

"I heard you say that was Lisburne, Manning," he shouted. "Don't try and lie out of it. You're supposed to know this coast—we presumed that you did. If this is flood tide, we'll be crushed by the weight of the ice when it ebbs."

Crawford grabbed the book of tables and thumbed rapidly through it.

"There's only a foot of tide here," offered Jerry. He was still trembling with anger at Crawford's denial that he had even suggested that the point of land had not been Cape Lisburne.

"A foot of tide can't hurt us," said Drake. "We're safe on that score."

"Yeah, if it's true," sneered Crawford. "I'd like to see it in print, though."

The sub was hopelessly wedged, and it was decided to bore up through the ice and locate themselves. The boring tube, twenty-four inches in diameter, was eased up against the ice with the pneumatic ram. A small motor turned the big pipe, and the saw edges on top cut their way up. Fifteen feet the pipe could extend above the top of the conning tower, and then if they were not through, more lengths could be added.

Crawford fed the ram as the tube crawled up. It ground slowly, easing upward as the rustless steel teeth cut into the ice. Once it jumped a foot. A sailor gasped—they were through! No! They had hit a blowhole. Again the bit chewed into something solid and the whine of the motor dropped in pitch. Then the ram jumped again. Every one held his breath. The pneumatic cylinder ran up to its limit.

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Crawford slammed the lever down. They were through!

AN exultant cry escaped Drake's lips and echoed through the clammy air. Others shouted in sheer relief from their breathless expectancy. Hardened pig-boat sailors grabbed wrenches and dropped off the inverted hatch cover from the bottom of the tube. They laughed away the tightness of the past half hour in rough joking. Jerry saw Connie dash her eyes with a tiny white handkerchief as he helped Crawford put an extension rod on the ram and shove the twenty-four-inch core of ice out through the top of the tube.

At the first breath of crisp air down the tube, laughter, hollow and half hysterical, broke from many throats. It was not until their boring machine had proved itself in an actual test that they felt relief from the brain tenseness that held them insensible to the cold since first diving under the ice.

An observation on the ice showed that they were only a few miles north of Point Hope, and luckily aground at ebb tide. Before the batteries were fully recharged, the one-foot tide had lifted the ice pan enough so that they could back out of danger. The course was corrected, and with hardly any delay and almost no damage to the submarine they were soon on their way, but the ease with which they escaped from their dangerous position in no way minimized the error which Crawford so boldly laid at Jerry's feet.

The captain lost no opportunity of picturing what might have happened if there had been a bigger tide and they had grounded when it was flood. As the water receded they would have been crushed like paper under the thousands of tons of ice. Crawford contended that nothing but luck had kept Jerry from being the cause of their deaths.

Jerry tried to exonerate himself by saying that he had told the skipper he wasn't sure, but Crawford always turned to Drake, who had heard only Jerry's first guess that the headland was Cape Lisburne.

Unfortunately, Jerry had been alone with the captain when he had advised an observation. Drake's word, together with Crawford's propaganda, had turned the crew against the Navy man. He felt that even Erik thought him responsible for the accident.

He was thoroughly miserable, when, at four o'clock the following morning, they dropped their mushroom anchor in the open roadstead of Point Barrow —the last land they would touch.

CHAPTER IV.

LAND'S END.

JERRY and Erik were on watch; the others below, getting ready to go ashore. The Arctic Ocean stretched away in almost glassy smoothness, but Jerry knew that six weeks of open water was all that one could depend on. From the shore came the excited yelping of malemute and husky sled dogs.

"Nice cheerful-looking place," said Erik, folding a chew of snuff into his under lip. When his sarcasm went unanswered he turned to the officer.

Jerry stood on the bridge looking off into the hazy distance in the direction of Tullimanirk Point to the east. He was living again on these bleak shores. The scenes of his childhood passed in review before the bright moistness of his eyes.

He was romping again with his Eskimo playmates—driving the frisky pups to little basket sleds—making

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whalebone bows so big that it taxed his immature strength to draw them—searching out the nests of the king eider duck while mamma *kaurik* fluttered around and put up a frightful squawking.

Once more he was taking his duckings in the icy waters while mastering the capricious little one-man skin canoes. Later he had been considered an expert with the cranky *kayak* when they went out to the floes to hunt seal.

It had been a boyhood few white children had ever known; and ended with his father's insistence that he go to Nome and finish the education that the mission school had started. Jerry couldn't remember his mother. She had died the year of his father's last whaling trip, when the floes had crushed his small ship and robbed him of his life's savings. Determined to make the Arctic pay him back, the elder Manning had settled on the icy shores and raised his son. Constant pals, they had been, except for the four winters spent in Nome.

Then Alaska's Representative in Congress had met Jerry and appointed him to the Naval Academy. That was the year his father had gone on a walrus hunt, and had never come back. Ages, it seemed to the young officer as he stood there on the bridge of the sub, viewing his homeland for the first time in almost a decade.

"SAY! Yumpin' yimminy! Am I drunk, or what?" Erik broke rudely into Jerry's reverie.

"What's the matter?" Jerry came to with a start.

"I yust saw couple of fellers pick up a boat thirty feet long and pack it down the beach. Now there's a flock of people—twenty, I guess—paddlin' out har' in it." Erik scratched his tow head thoughtfully, and dropped a brown squirt over the side. "What are they? Yiants or somethin'?"

"Oh, that's only an *umiak*," grinned Jerry.

"*Ja*, sure. That explains it," grunted the Swede, sarcastically. "I thought for a minute that it might be a wheelbarrow."

Jerry laughed and explained that an *umiak* is a frame of driftwood over which six or seven bearded sealskins have been stretched, and though they can carry a ton and a half of freight, they only weigh three or four hundred pounds.

More boats put out from shore as Drake, Constance and Crawford came on deck. Jerry hadn't seen much of Connie on the trip up, and this was the first time in daylight.

She was dressed in a vividly striped white blanket coat, like those affected by sports devotees at Lake Placid or St. Moritz. Her tiny feet were incased in sensible walking shoes, and a white *béret*, from beneath which a vagrant lock of her rich auburn hair peeked, completed her costume.

Though she seemed not to know that Jerry was on earth, he admitted to himself, with bountiful generosity, that she was ravishingly beautiful as she stood there in the paleness of the Arctic morning sun, that set off her features in a cameo-like profile—a Drake profile, softened with exquisite feminine charm.

"It must have taken a lot of pampering to spoil that girl," Jerry told himself.

THE *umiaks* paddled up alongside and there was much shouting and waving as some of the Eskimos recognized Jerry. Questions were hurled at him from the skin boats, and

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answers in their native tongue were shouted back.

At Drake's suggestion, Jerry made arrangements to have the party taken ashore, where they were welcomed to Barrow by Charlie Powers, proprietor of the trading post and the farthest north white resident on continental America.

Jerry was at the trading post when Connie, Drake, Crawford and Powers came in. Drake paid the trader for having the fuel and battery water taken out to the sub. While Jerry made a purchase of Eskimo skin clothing from Powers, Connie and the captain wandered around fingering the tiers of walrus tusks, marveling at the fineness of the sinew thread that hung in skeins from the low, blackened beams. Crawford interrupted Jerry's purchasing to buy a beautiful blue fox pelt as a present for Connie.

When Crawford saw the pile of stuff that Jerry had piled on the rough counter he said: "I have attended to the purchasing of all necessary supplies, Manning. I will have to ask you to forego buying any souvenirs till we're on our way back." There was a nasty inflection in his last remark. "Space is at a premium," he added.

"Well, then, why don't you throw away some of that junk you have and make room for something serviceable?" Jerry shot back.

"This seems to be clothing," said Crawford, indicating the pile of reindeer-skin garments. "I have all the clothing we need, selected it personally."

"Yes, but what kind?" A dangerous paleness played around Jerry's lips. Crawford was evidently trying to make a fool of him in front of the people that had known him since he was a kid. "I've seen what you have in the slop chest," said Jerry. "Nothing but heavy winter clothing such as is used in the States. There will be times when we will have to go out on the ice. I've seen blizzards here almost every month in the year. As for myself, I'm going to have an outfit in case there is any hunting or scouting to be done. I'd advise you to do the same."

"The clothing I purchased in San Francisco is ample," snapped Crawford impatiently.

"Ask Powers," was Jerry's answer.

Drake got up from his seat on a pile of tobacco caddies, where he had been handing out cigars to the Eskimo women, and joined the group at the counter.

The trader's explanation that there was no such thing as store clothes that would be of service if they were forced to stay on the ice, evidently convinced Drake of the wisdom of Jerry's advice, for he asked Powers to show him the latest in reindeer wearing apparel. Crawford became disagreeable, and after almost insulting the trader by questioning his judgment, said something in an undertone about meddlesome Navy men.

JERRY'S self-control slipped away from him. With a quick step he squared himself before the angry captain.

"Crawford," he said, in a low, tense voice, "you are either going to treat me with the same respect you do an ordinary seaman or I'll—I'll—" Blind rage choked the lieutenant.

"You'll what?" spat the captain. "Quit, I suppose. What's the matter? That jam you got us into back there scare you?"

Jerry leaned forward as Drake stepped between them. He was balanced on the balls of his feet, his wide shoulders tense and his lean jaw

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squared at an aggressive angle. His hard fists hung in readiness at his sides.

"Cut out that kind of talk, captain." Drake placed a meaty hand against Jerry's chest, while he faced Crawford with angry eyes. "This trip is worthless to me unless I have a Navy observer aboard."

"Don't be afraid I'll quit, Mr. Drake," said Jerry. "I'm going on the trip, all right. I just want to show this captain of yours that he can't ride me."

"Well, you fellows try and get along. And as far as that error back there goes, captain, what Powers told us explains that. This is the first time the ice has been driven below Lisburne at this season in twenty years. Manning can be excused for that mistake." Drake was seriously trying to prevent trouble: his trip would be difficult enough without dissension.

"Better make me up about six complete outfits of skin clothing," he told the trader. "Is there anything else we will need?" he asked, turning to the Navy man.

"Why take two kinds of rifles?" questioned Jerry. "I saw a Winchester and a Mannlicher-Schoenauer aboard. Better have two alike. If one gets broken or lost the ammunition is good for the other."

"That Mannlicher is my private gun," snapped Crawford, following Jerry's glance to the rack of new guns along the log wall. "I'm taking it!"

"You're the skipper," said Jerry with a shrug of resignation. "I thought space being at a premium we were going to carry only useful things." He started for the door with his skin clothing over his arm. "Better trade it for one of those good Winchesters," he slung back over his shoulder.

At one of the sod igloos Jerry stopped and bought a native sled that he knocked down into a compact bundle. A native took him back to the sub.

An hour later Powers brought the rest of the party out. Connie carried a young malemute pup aboard, while Drake and Crawford unloaded a pile of skin clothing. The captain dropped below decks and came back with his shiny new gun. He turned this over to Powers.

"Humph!" Jerry grinned to himself. "I guess Drake changed his mind for him."

CHAPTER V.

UNDER THE ICE.

MID afternoon saw them refueled to capacity and on their way north along the 155th meridian. The Ultima Thule split the glassy water with her sharp prow as they waved good-by to the last land north—as far as any one knew.

A school of whales disported themselves directly in their path, but the whir of the propellers gave them warning. Walrus were seen basking on a detached ice floe that sparkled like a jewel in the emerald setting of the sea.

Crawford was standing the deck watch after dinner when Jerry came up for a smoke. An exceptionally bright evening sun tipped the crystal tops of the small ice pans with gold leaf. They challenged the brilliance of their winter rival, the borealis, as they rocked like gem flotsam in the wash of the boat.

Jerry was thrilled, just as he had been thrilled during the sun-fed nights of his youth; he would never tire of the beauty of Arctic nature. He felt

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sure that the girl would have appreciated the picture, too, and mentally criticized Crawford for not calling her.

Then the ice blink showed up ahead, like a long white line on a blackboard. The ice pans became thicker. The captain swung right and left, hitting the cakes in the middle rather than taking the blow on either side. The rotted ice fell away under the knife-like bow.

Straight ahead, Crawford held her at full speed. Jerry watched him, at first with amused interest. What was the man trying to do? Show off? Certainly he must know the danger. In a minute it was apparent that he didn't. Crawford grinned as the sharp prow split the soft cakes.

When they were within ten or fifteen boat lengths of the blink Jerry shouted:

"What the devil you going to do, Crawford? Wreck us?"

The captain turned with angry impatience.

"I'm going to try out her ram on the slushy edge," he snapped. "If you're scared, go below."

"That's not slush!" Jerry cracked. "That ice is six or eight feet thick. The tide has been breaking floes off all day." His words were sharp, convincing. Crawford's face drained white. His eyes started.

"Full speed astern!" he shouted. The helmsman yanked the two engine room telegraphs into reverse. They were within eight boat lengths, and Crawford's frightened eyes were glued on the ice barrier.

"That 'll never do it!" shouted Jerry, jumping for the hatch. "Get below—quick!" he yelled to Crawford and the helmsman, giving the former a sharp shove.

As they disappeared down the ladder, he reached over the coaming and threw the switch that signaled for a crash dive. Klaxons blared in every compartment below, and he heard the growl of the Diesels change to the hum of motors. The levers of the big Kingston valves clanged: he knew that tons of water were pouring into her empty ballast tanks. The outboard vents whistled as the air was ejected.

A quick glance over his shoulder showed him there was still headway on the boat.

Would she make it?

He saw that the decks were already awash. He dropped through the hatch and slammed the cover as a tub of ice water drenched him. A quick twist of the lever and the clamps ground into place as the sea closed over the sub.

WITH a grinding crunch the sled runners took the impact with the lower edge of the ice. "Stop both motors," he called, hitting the floor plates of the control chamber with a bang.

"Slow ahead," countermanded Crawford, brushing Jerry aside. He wiped streaming sweat from his face, turned panic-bright eyes to the depth gauges. "Level her off at thirty," he ordered in a voice that cracked on the end.

Jerry saw that the helmsman stood shaking and white at the steering station, the only man besides him and Crawford who knew what had just happened. He relieved the man, and then turned to the captain.

"How much water under—"

"Silence in the boat!" shrieked Crawford, reaching over and pressing the sonic depth-finder key. The vibrant sound found its way to the ocean floor and echoed back, recording a depth of one hundred and twenty feet. Everything O. K. No harm done.

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Crawford again wiped his face with a trembling hand. He fought to control the panic that left him unstrung.

"Manning," he gritted through teeth that chattered, "if you ever interfere with my operation of this boat again, I'll put you in irons." He fought for more words, but his fear-strictured throat only gargled.

Jerry stabbed him with a look of contempt.

"Aw—bilge!" he said, and turning away he passed through the small doorway into the forward battery compartment.

As he came to his bunk he caught a glimpse of Connie through the open door of her cabin. She stood before a mirror combing her long silken hair, as unconscious of the danger through which they had just passed as the pup that was tearing at a green slipper in an ecstasy of delight at her feet. Jerry threw himself on his bunk with a muttered curse. This promised to be a pleasant trip, he thought ironically. He'd have to have it out with Crawford yet: it was inevitable.

When the time came he took over his watch without so much as an acknowledgment that he had heard the captain's instructions. He stood by the maze of instruments in the control compartment and kept the old pig-boat headed due north, while making fifteen-minute recordings of the depth as they plowed along. When the engineer officer reported only a half hour's juice left in the batteries, he sent a sailor to call Crawford.

With the captain in command, they eased off on her rudders till the two hundred pounds of positive buoyancy brought her up against the ice as the motors were shut down. It would be necessary to bore up through the ice, so that the Diesels could be run.

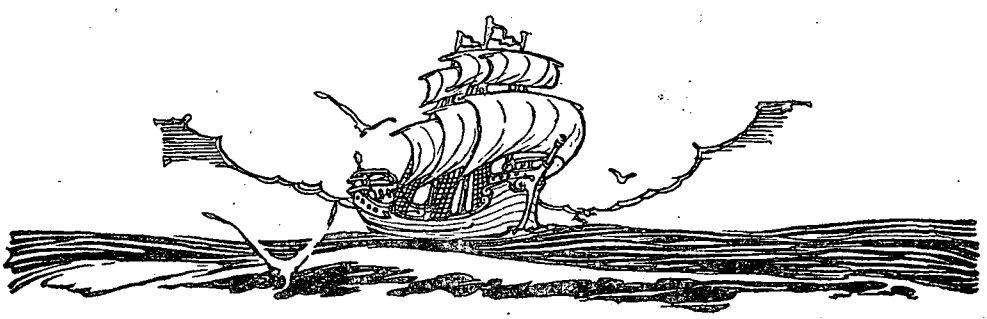
The two steel spuds that were to hold the ship against any movement by tide or current were run up into the ice and the boring started.

For a minute the revolving tube fairly seemed to eat its way upward. The tensed occupants of the compartment relaxed—all had known that not enough electricity was left in the batteries to carry them out from under the ice and that the Diesels could not be run to charge the batteries without air.

Suddenly the whine of the motor on the drilling tube rose to a shriek. Anxious faces turned to Crawford.

But no answer was needed. For they saw that the drilling tube was no longer moving upward. Bodies froze in horror as they realized that for some reason the drill would cut no farther. They were trapped under thousands of tons of ice.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



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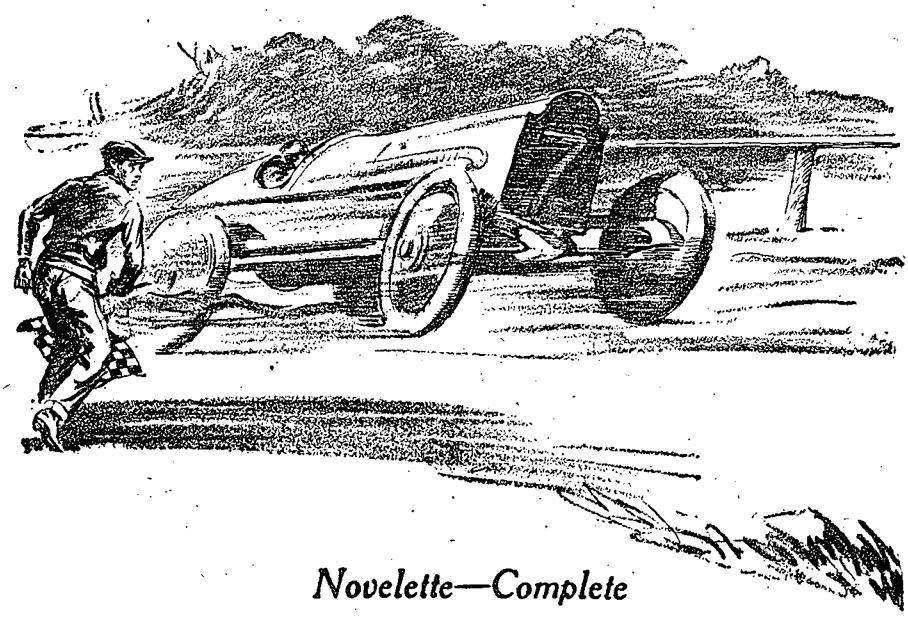
Speed-Storm

"They never come back," every road-race driver swore; and Cliff Kennedy knew how that crash had shaken his nerve, as he determined to get it back or perish in the roaring caldron of the French Grand Prix

By BARRE LYNDON



Novelette—Complete

CHAPTER I.

DESTRUCTION.

"WE'RE testing this engine to destruction!"

Joyce Leigh heard the mechanic's words but faintly through the sustained roaring in the shed. She looked beyond him and saw a smoke-hazed mass of quivering metal with intent men about it, their faces limned starkly in the brilliant glare of shaded electric lights.

"Has Mr. Kennedy arrived yet?" She craned to call into the big English mechanic's ear.

"He's inside!" Plug Sparkes jerked a tool-roughed thumb over his shoulder, and she edged past him through the doorway into the building.

She could feel the concrete floor trembling under the leashed, virulent fury of the great motor as it was forced relentlessly to the limit of its power. The reek of hot oil was acrid on the air and, as the door closed behind her, the furious uproar seemed to swell to a howling, menacing note. It was startling after the quiet duskiness of the Sussex evening from out which she had come.

The motor, Joyce knew, was a duplicate of those built for the team of Fleet cars entered in the French Grand Prix. The power unit was being run at the peak of its speed until it

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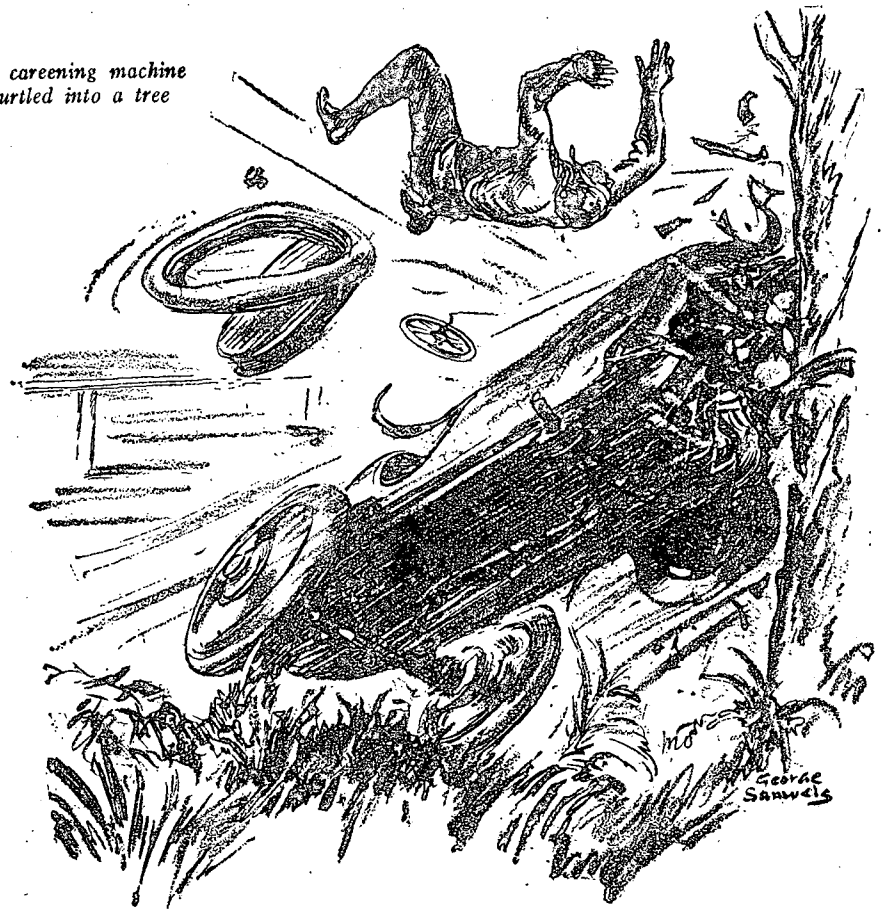

The careening machine hurtled into a tree

smashed; its sacrifice would tell just how hard the other engines could be pressed in the race.

There was something cruel in this spectacle of ruthless men straining a beautiful piece of mechanism to breaking-point, and against the grim background of swathing blue oil-smoke and agonized metal, Joyce stood in strange contrast.

She was dark, with a small hat tightly pulled over her shingled hair. Her frock was cerise, touched at throat and cuffs with the orange flash of a wide open exhaust streaking flame in the night.

She saw her father, jerking at one end of his grizzled mustache, watching the staring white dials at the side of the engine, following every shuddering movement of the black needles. At his elbow was old Dan Schiferly, the racing foreman; his temples and cheeks were dewed with sweat, and he plucked nervously at the belt of his overalls.

Berkeley West, the team manager, was close against the heavy steel cradle which formed the test bed. Armored exhaust pipes, hot and shuddering, stretched unnoticed near his legs. Untidy hair straggled his forehead, his beetling brows were bent, the corners of his lips were turned down and the narrowed gaze of his dark eyes

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was steady on the dials. A pitiless, dour man was Berkeley West, with thought only for the success of Fleet machines in the heat and smother of hazardous racing circuits.

With him was Franklin Baird, the best of the Fleet drivers after Clifford Kennedy. The nostrils of his hooked nose were pinched in and the fingers of one hand, ribbed with muscle, were dug between his neck and his collar as he listened to the crying of the tortured motor.

Around these four stood the Fleet racing mechanics; silent, tense figures in overalls splotched from grease and oil. Some of them looked a little pallid; it was their work which was being tested now.

JOYCE saw Cliff Kennedy as her gaze ranged beyond these men. The young American stood apart, where a sharp edge of light slashed across his tanned features. She caught her breath; he looked different than before his crash at Le Mans.

There was a scar now, ruddy against his bronze, running in an angry weal from his temple down his cheek. But it was not this alone which had changed him. His wide-set eyes were quirked at the corners and his lips were tighter. His very attitude, as he stood, was altered.

Joyce had seen him, when his own motor had been on test for the Le Mans race, bending with his ear almost on the hot cylinder block, eager to detect the faintest sound which, foreign in the sonorous roar, would tell of a defect. Now, he was drawn back; nervously, she thought.

Seven weeks earlier he had burst a tire coming down the straightaway to Mulsanne corner at better than a hundred miles an hour, to skid devastatingly and wreck his machine amongst the trees that bordered the road. He should have been killed, by all the laws which obtain in the wreck-littered world where men think a mile a minute is not fast.

Yet he had been comparatively unhurt. He had spent three weeks in a French hospital, and had just returned from a month on the Yorkshire moors, where he had been getting himself fit to handle his racing Fleet in the difficult Grand Prix circuit at La Chapelle.

This was the first time that Joyce had seen him since he crumpled a white bed cover in his brown hands as, in his delirium, he fought his machine for control.

No man can crash at high speed and escape absolutely unscathed. Some impression must inevitably be made on his taut nerve, and the whole of the Fleet team—with one exception—believed that Cliff's racing spirit had been broken; his mental stress in hospital seemed to prove it. The exception was his mechanic, Plug Sparkes.

As a different note came into the voice of the motor, Joyce saw Cliff draw back almost imperceptibly. The rest bent to watch the dials yet more closely, while the whole massy shape vibrated until its outlines became blurred.

Its howling drone lifted to a tearing scream. Through this the whine of the supercharger rose to a continuous, piercing shriek. Joyce lifted her hands to cover her ears as the doomed engine bellowed in strident appeal. The leashed speed-devils in its quivering shape pleaded, thousand-tongued, for mercy, howling in a climax of sustained effort—which changed to an abrupt, jarring clatter.

"Switch off!"

Her father's voice broke clearly

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through all other sound. The death rattle of the motor jumped to a wild pitch, then clanked swiftly to silence while, from the test bed, a cloud of blue-black smoke surged out, men backing as hot oil splashed viciously.

Joyce saw Cliff start away, but Franklin Baird remained where he stood, peering through the choking screen.

"Con rod gone!" The English driver's voice sounded peculiarly small in the sudden quietude. "It's sticking through the crank case."

Baird straightened up, lean lips stretching in a smile as he looked across to Joyce's father, the original designer of Fleet cars, and added:

"But these engines have got all the stuff we want. We're going to beat everything on wheels when we get to the circuit!"

CLIFFORD KENNEDY wiped a splash of oil from his cuff as he stood behind the mechanics. He heard the sharp, tinny crackle of hot exhaust pipes contracting as they cooled, and saw men shifting through the stifling smoke which swelled slowly from the wrecked motor.

The American was a racing driver because he liked it, because he loved cars and because he loved Joyce Leigh. Some day, he would tell her that.

His board-track work, and a win at Indianapolis, had brought him an invitation to join the European end of the Fleet organization as a driver. Mr. Leigh was trying to make Fleet cars known on the Continental speedways, and good driving had gained Cliff his place as the team leader.

Berkeley West, Baird and the rest were all English and had all been trained in other racing teams, but each now bent his every thought and all his energy to making a success of Fleet cars. The coming Grand Prix would be a supreme test.

As team leader it was Cliff's job to ride with the pacemakers when they try to crack one another up at the start of a race; the team leader needs steely nerve—or no nerves at all. Cliff's crash at Le Mans had been his first of any consequence, and he knew perfectly well that his old joyous revelling in speed for its own sake was now gone.

Those age-long moments between the fluffy roar of the burst tire and the fierce welter of shattering sound which had brought oblivion had shown him the awful ruthlessness of the fate which waits on a man's mistake or the failure of his machine.

Set deep in Cliff's mind was the dread that he might burst another tire and be hurled to a darkness from which he would not waken. He knew that the fear was there, and he had come back to the Fleet works determined to hide it, resolved to recover his old confidence and gain those speed laurels which meant fortune and, possibly, Joyce.

The French Grand Prix is the classic event of the European motor racing year, and the Fleet designer was sparing nothing in an effort to send one of his team beneath the winner's flag.

All Cliff's road-racing experience had been but a preparation for this, and he was desperately keen to ride, for all the nagging apprehension which gripped him.

THE rumble of heavy pulley wheels sounded as mechanics dragged hoisting tackle up to lift the hot motor. Mr. Leigh gave clipped instructions, then sighted the lithe-built, watching figure and came striding across, hand outstretched.

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"Hello, Clifford. I didn't know you had arrived." His gaze lifted to the new, livid scar and instantly fell away. "You're looking fit. No—ill effects?"

"None at all." Cliff smiled suddenly, saying what he wanted believed as true.

Mr. Leigh looked at Cliff squarely. "I was afraid you'd need longer to—to—" He hesitated.

"To get my nerve back?" Cliff laughed. "I suppose you all think I've lost it? Well, if I have, I'll find it again in the same place—on the circuit!"

He was aware that every man in the shed was looking at him; some covertly, some openly. Their eyes showed darkly from faces bathed in the hard light from above. He smiled around at them, while his scar seemed to burn and he felt the strange constriction of skin about it.

"It's good to hear you talking like that!" Mr. Leigh exclaimed. "By all we hear, this Grand Prix is going to be a tight race. I'm glad we can count you in anyhow!" and he shook hands again while Plug Sparkes came over, his lumpy features wearing a wide grin.

Plug was the biggest man in the Fleet team. He had been born in London and reared on gasoline, so he said. And of all the drivers for whom he had worked, he liked best this sinewy young American who gave himself no airs and who had worked hard to beat Continental speedmen at their own game. The difference between track work and European road racing is the same as the difference between paste and diamonds—they look alike until they're tried. Road work is the acid test of the racing driver.

Plug had a massive jaw and an underlip which jutted when he was puzzled, or when he was up against something. It protruded now, but slowly drew in as he studied his driver's face and found satisfaction in what he saw there.

Plug talked for a minute or two, giving Cliff details of the progress of his new car.

"Have you seen Miss Leigh?" Cliff asked at last.

"She's here, sir. Over by the door."

All the glare of electrics, struggling through the thin veils of swirling smoke, could not hide the warmness of her smile as she met Cliff's gaze. He stepped across the oil-smirched concrete, but his greeting was drowned for her by the harsh grating of chains as the motor was swung to a trestle.

"You're looking fit, Cliff!" she exclaimed.

There was a faint furrow between her brows while her eyes searched his. He sensed the questioning of her glance, and he knew that it would be harder to hide his secret from her than from any one except, maybe, Franklin Baird.

BAIRD was watching them as they talked. His lean face wore its cold smile when he came over and offered his congratulations to Cliff. Baird had driven on every course in Europe, and in every road race from the desperate Targa Florio to the valorous French Grand Prix.

He had never yet won an event in which his machine had been closely challenged. He had never taken the winner's flag when leadership involved a mad dog fight: a close-fought, high-speed duel which means clipping split seconds from every corner and daring the thin inches that form the margin between safety and flaming disaster.

As second driver in the Fleet team, Baird had gone through to victory

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more than once during the past two seasons—after Cliff had smashed the opposition of the leaders, his own motor dying under stress of the fight, so that he ended in the dead-car park while Baird took the giant bouquets and the plaudits of the crowd.

Baird did not realize how much he owed to the man ahead of him when he won like that, because he had no team spirit. But he knew the game; he knew all about the quivering nerves which can jag in a man's stomach when he is waiting for the starter's flag to drop, and the emptiness which comes around his heart when he goes too fast into a turn.

Baird knew, also, the subtle difference between a driver who is fearless and one who has reason to dread what the race may bring. He, if any one, could detect the difference which the crash had made in Cliff.

"You look all right!" Baird growled.

"He's ready for anything," Joyce cut in, and she glanced from Cliff to Baird.

For a long while she had sensed latent hostility between them. She guessed that Baird wanted to lead the Fleet team in the season's biggest race, taking Cliff's place; but she had yet to learn that this growing antagonism was actuated by their regard for herself.

"Well, he'll need to be fit," and Baird smiled with a slow stretch of his chilly lips. "We've got Delage, Bugatti, some new Mercédès, and a team of Maseratis against us—and they'll set a pace that will set the road on fire."

"The faster it is, the better we'll come out of it," Cliff told him. "We've got real motors, from the looks of that one," and he glanced to where every mechanic who could get a tool on the power unit was busy dismantling it.

"THE cars are all right—so long as you're all right!" It was Berkeley West who spoke from behind Baird, and the team manager's heavy face was morose. "They say a man can't crash like you did and be the same afterward."

Nowhere is there as much plain speaking as in a racing team. The ceaseless labor of preparation and the ceaseless worry, the deliberate trading in men's lives, the huge reward of victory, and the misery of defeat after so much work, this tends to bring out in speech what a man would normally keep hidden in his mind.

"Well, if I'm not the same—" Cliff began.

"You're not!" Baird cut in bluntly. "I was watching you when you were standing by the engine just before it blew up. You looked nervous as a scalded pup to me."

Cliff glanced from the driver to the team manager, each as inflexible as case-hardened steel. Joyce, watching him, saw the scar twitch as he frowned and leaned forward.

"Nervous as a scalded pup, eh?" he repeated. "That means you think I'm going to fall down in this race. Well, I don't know anything about how I'll shape, but I do know that I'm not afraid of any sour-faced Britisher who only sits in the pit and tells good men to go faster, West! And when that flag drops I'll set a pace that 'll make my Number Two—you, Baird!—imagine he's trying to follow something shot out of a gun! And when it's all over, maybe we'll have another chat about scalded pups!"

He nodded to both of them, and turned away.

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Outside, alone with Joyce, he said: "Plug's the only one who really believes that I haven't lost my nerve. You think I have, don't you?"

"You're not q u i t e—the—same." Joyce met his gaze f r a n k l y as he looked down at her. The silence in the building was heavy about them after the noise of the test-shed. "Are you?" she asked.

Cliff smiled slowly, the tip of the scar slanting.

"Are you?" she repeated. "Cliff, you went through enough to upset any one, and you're nervous still. Don't you think it would be better if you told dad that you want more time to get over it, before you drive again?"

"Scalded pup?" he asked.

"That's not fair! You know I don't mean anything of the sort, Cliff!" She stared up at him, and in that moment she was remembering how the machines had come past the stands in the last Continental road race she had seen—wicked little r a c i n g a u t o s that boomed and howled and skittered on the road in frenzied speed, heart-shaking. "Everybody says—"

"I know what everybody says!" Cliff was not smiling now. "I would not admit it to any one except you, but I know you'll understand, Joyce. It's queer, but I do feel as if something's cracked inside. Not physically, but it's there all the same. Like the crack we saw in that con rod just now. Not altogether b r o k e n yet—only cracked."

She nodded silently.

"It's as though my crash had left a flaw. It may be only imagination, but if I don't mend it the flaw will creep. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I think I do."

"Well, I've thought about it a lot. You know the way you braze metal to mend it, on a red-hot bed? I'm going to braze my flaw in the Grand Prix—that 'll be hot enough, from the way things are shaping! If I don't, I'll snap altogether."

CHAPTER II.

WRECKAGE.

GRAY-BLACK, the road wound and rose, dipped and straightened through straggling w o o d s and green fields still shrouded in faint mist, forming a giant triangle on the face of the French countryside.

For ten and a half miles it ran, hemmed by partly built stands, their raw woodwork showing like bare bones; through barrier-guarded towns and by corners yellow from safety sandbanks; bending giddily down hills and whipping up bush-green slopes, past spectators c h i l l e d by the early morning air: this was the racing circuit of La Chapelle, in the ancient province of Anjou, now cleared for the first practice bout.

Over its surface, reënforced to withstand the hammering of stamping tires, Grand Prix machines flashed, colorful and meteoric: Italy's blazing red machines and the blue cars of France, white Mercédès from Germany, Austrian machines in cream and black, Belgium's best in rich yellow, and England's purposeful racers in green. All the C o n t i n e n t's colors, readying for battle against the white and blue which the American Fleets carried.

Here and there about the circuit watchful men lay in pairs amongst the bushes, or in the shallow, grass-fringed ditches, armed with stop-watches and binoculars; they were team scouts, timing the performances

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of rival cars that they might gauge how hard their own racing machines must run when the starter's flag sent them into the speed-fight.

Where the road ripped straight as a sword-cut past the main stands and the dark lines of replenishment pits, drivers and mechanics were busy on cars that stood there. Behind the half equipped pit planks others watched, worrying over the times of their teams.

In the Fleet pit stood a small group, waiting for Cliff Kennedy's car to appear.

"Nine minutes!" West's voice sounded harshly. "He'd be lapping at under seventy miles an hour if he came around now, and he isn't even in sight yet!"

"He's taking it steadily," Mr. Leigh answered quietly. "I don't blame him."

"He made two laps at barely sixty, and he knows darned well that he's being timed now to see what he can do!" Baird exclaimed over his shoulder. "That's no speed, with the Alfa Romeos and the rest of them hitting eighty and better! He's not going fast because he's afraid to put his foot down!"

"Don't talk like that, Baird!"

"Well, it's not Kennedy's fault. He can't help it if his nerve's gone," the driver growled.

"Ten minutes!" West glanced at his watch. "That means he's lapping at hardly sixty." He went on: "It would be better to stop him riding altogether on this showing. He'll be a danger to himself and everybody else if—"

"Here he comes!"

The three craned forward. A machine was streaking into sight along the straightaway; its narrow, single-seated body seemed hunched behind the deep radiator. It flung toward them, road-spume flicking from the tires.

"PLUGS!" Cliff yelled the word as he levered up behind the wheel, to come over the side of the machine and dive at the motor hood in one jump. His mechanic jerked from the pit-plank and wrenched at the heavy hood-straps, while Cliff snapped open the clips which locked the cover down.

"I burned a plug out on the run down to Camelin," he said, and asked: "Bit slow, wasn't I?"

"Fifty-nine, I made it," West told him. "Fifty-seven both laps before that. Most of the rest are hitting over eighty."

"Sure it was plugs?" Baird asked, and he grinned in his thin way.

"Yes, my mag's all—" Cliff broke off as he read the meaning behind the English driver's question. He glanced at him sharply, then looked at the others.

They were all watching him, weighing him, thinking that he was traveling slowly because he dared not go faster; he could see it on their faces. But he made no comment, and moved to where Joyce stood.

"Who's going quick?" he asked.

"Baird lapped at over eighty, and they say a Mercédès got round at eighty-four," she said, and he whistled faintly. She added: "I think one of the Maseratis must have beaten that."

"Eighty-four, that's traveling!" he commented. "I've been around picking out the bumps, but I'll try and open up a bit now."

"Cliff, it would please dad if you could do a fast lap," Joyce spoke quickly, leaning toward him, her voice low. "I can see that he's worried

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about you. They think you're being too slow."

"I am," he agreed, "but I'll hit the high spots this time!"

The scar on his cheek seemed to be burning as he glanced at Baird and went jumping back to his machine. Cliff set the racing auto in the center of the road, motor screaming in gear while he took both hands from the wheel to slide his goggles over his eyes.

"Sure it was plugs?" Baird's sneer strummed into his brain. He had meant that previous lap to be a fast one, but not so fast as this would be now!

He *was* shaky. The Le Mans crash had upset him more than he had imagined. There was an odd quivering above his stomach as the road streaked toward him, its green fringe blurred to the unfocussed haziness which is the effect of speed. That quivering came from nerves. But he drove himself to get speed, more speed.

Soon the tree-scattered rise of Mont Camelin whipped up into view. On the high ground beyond it Cliff glimpsed the cluster of buildings which formed a village there. He cleared the last of the humps and for half a mile in front the road ran absolutely dead flat, to lose itself as it turned on the hill.

He saw that he was overtaking two machines which were streaking at the slope. One was a Mercédès, grim and efficient in Germany's all-white, with red racing numbers like blurs of blood on the scuttle and tail. The other was a French machine, and they were duelling as France and Germany had always duelled.

One of the machines was pulling out to pass the other, and Cliff shouted involuntarily when he saw that the driver had cut the bend too closely.

A stake broke, and strung wire snaked in a whipping thread of silver as the auto's wheels fumbled at the edge of the unpaved footpath. They slid off, and the car's tail slung abruptly outward in a slashing skid, blocking the Fleet's track.

Heart leaping, Cliff bored on the steering wheel, trying to pull onto the footpath and get past the sliding machine. The Fleet jumped high when its front wheels struck the edge of the sidewalk and a coughing, blurred explosion followed as a front tire burst under the sledge hammer impact.

Torn rubber flew out, and the machine slued wildly. Cliff saw the rubber whip high from the lamed wheel, and his every nerve jerked to tension as he battled for control.

From the mad, whirling greenness jumped the dark shape of a squat telegraph pole, and Cliff was aware of a shattering shock.

There was an empty moment in which he spun and tumbled in the air, then earth plowed hotly under his hands.

He caught the quick odor of damp grass before everything blacked out.

WHEN a man has been slammed abruptly into unconsciousness, some rooted instinct makes him try to get to his feet even before his senses have fully returned.

Cliff, struggling upright, became aware of a beating in his brain, of what felt like ribbons of fire against his face, and of lank grass which heaved and rolled peculiarly.

Two officials were running, waving big yellow flags in an "*Arrêt complet!*"—a halt signal to following machines. They were passing the French and the German cars, which had halted.

The two drivers and the gendarme were squatting near him. But the road

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had been cleared again and practicing machines were blaring up the hill, and through all their roaring he recognized the boom of Fleet exhausts as a little bunch of cars braked to a stop below the wreck, men leaping out.

Mr. Leigh, Berkeley West, and Joyce came running over the torn grass with Plug and two mechanics, while Cliff clutched at the German driver's thick shoulder and eased himself to his feet.

"Hurt, sir?" Plug jumped at him, his broad face concerned.

"I don't think so." Cliff tried to smile.

"How did it happen?" Mr. Leigh asked quietly, and when Cliff had tried to tell him he commented: "Tire burst, eh? Feeling shaky, aren't you?"

"A bit," Cliff admitted. "Hope I haven't smashed the machine up too badly."

"Never mind the car, so long as you're all right."

"You'd better get back to camp and have a rest, sir," Plug grunted in his ear as Mr. Leigh and Berkeley West scrambled across to the smashed machine. "You're groggy."

"Look after the car, Plug," Cliff said. "The steering must be about wrecked, I think, and I know—" He broke off as Joyce caught at his arm.

She stared at him, then glanced at the other two drivers. The wiry Frenchman was frowning; the big German was also watching Cliff intently, his gray eyes narrowed.

Both looked at Joyce in the same moment, and she guessed that their thoughts were the same as her own. Like herself, they knew that there was but one thing to be done with Cliff now, because it was plain that he was physically uninjured.

"Plug, go to the car," she said crisply. "Cliff, lean on me and I'll help you down to the road."

"*Soll ich mit Ihnen gehen?*—shall I go with you?" The German jumped to Cliff's other side while Joyce slipped an arm around him; the Frenchman followed as they moved down the steep slope toward the Fleet sports roadster in which she had arrived with her father.

"Cliff, you've got to drive this car—hard!" she said suddenly.

"I don't think I can." His quivering lips smiled wanly. He leaned with one hand bearing on the side of the roadster. She could see his arm shuddering, while she still helped his weakened legs to support his body. "Let me rest a bit, and then—"

"No—now! Now, Cliff, or it'll be too late. You understand, don't you?" He heard the Frenchman chattering, and felt the German driver easing him firmly to the opened door of the machine, grunting encouragingly. Both knew that Joyce was suggesting the racing man's drastic remedy for an uninjured driver after a crash: put him on a fast car and make him drive hard until he gets his nerve back again. Otherwise the shock of the wreck might gain a grip and never leave him.

"All right, but I'd better go alone," Cliff told her.

"No, I'll come. Otherwise you'll drive too slowly. Get in!" Her voice was imperious now, and she pushed him in, the German and the Frenchman aiding, nodding approvingly.

HUGGING the side of the road, the roadster toured around the course. The need for controlling the machine occupied Cliff's thoughts, and the necessity of keeping out of the way of racing autos, still practicing, forced him to alertness.

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A new series of minor impressions gradually overlay that which the crash had made and, almost unconsciously, his foot went down on the throttle control. They gathered speed, with Joyce sitting close beside him, one arm flung over and behind his shoulders, although she did not speak after they got through Camelin.

Every man who has been close to death knows the feeling which comes afterward, when his nerves yet quake under the shock of threatened oblivion while his mind triumphs at the escape.

When Cliff glanced at Joyce he saw her as never before. He saw vividly the living color in her rounded cheeks and the deep sympathy in her steady eyes, the sweet curve of her lips and the soft swelling of her throat.

"Joyce, I'm glad you're here!" he exclaimed suddenly, and her understanding answer was the pressure of her arm across his shoulders.

"Keep going now," she urged. "See what you can get out of the machine. Plug is supposed to have tuned it up for me."

Cliff flogged a flat sixty miles an hour average out of the roadster after that, which was quite fast work on La Chapelle circuit with a roadster not stripped for speed and lacking the right springing for quick cornering.

Joyce watched the raggedness go out of Cliff's driving. She saw the color come back to his cheeks while his eyes began to wrinkle up at the corners as their gaze narrowed, concentrating on the road.

Sudenly on every corner appeared the flags which meant that the time for official practicing was over, and Cliff eased his speed. He turned the roadster toward La Chapelle and the Fleet camp, slowing almost to a crawl in the traffic-cluttered streets.

"Thanks for making me drive like that." He turned to his companion. "I'd have dodged it, by myself."

"I know you would — any one would!" Joyce answered, and she drew her arm away from his shoulders. "But that wasn't your fault a bit, Cliff! You were so shaken up."

"So weak!" he growled. "And I wasn't really hurt. It's queer how that kind of thing gets you."

"Well, you didn't just curl up, you know," Joyce exclaimed quietly. "You did get on your feet."

A STOUTLY-BUILT warehouse held the Fleet racing camp. It was a somber place, with an arched entrance and no windows other than those on the first story, where the mechanics slept.

Two dust-cloaked Fleets—one the reserve car and the other No. 3 in the team—were now ranged at the side of the stone floor. Mechanics were lounging near them, and they hurried out as they heard a borrowed breakdown truck clatter slowly to the arch, towing the tilted, dented hulk of Cliff's auto.

Mechanics swarmed at the car and, three men to each wheel, carried it bodily through the entrance and dropped it to the center of the floor.

It was already dismantled when Cliff, accompanied by Joyce, entered.

"How's the car?" he asked. "I'm sorry it happened, and I—" He broke off as head mechanic Schiferly moved from the wreck, to face Mr. Leigh.

"The radiator's gone, of course, and the blower casing's cracked all ways," Schiferly said. "The front axle's snapped just by the near spring anchorage, and the frame's broken on that side—it must have hit that telegraph pole there." He spoke slowly and

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thoughtfully. "I think the frame giving saved the motor. There doesn't seem to be much else wrong. We've got a spare blower, and another radiator—two of those, in fact. The motor isn't touched. If we can get spares by to-morrow, and worked all hours, we can have this ready for the race."

Mr. Leigh had heard Schiferly's words. He touched Cliff on the arm, then drew him out of earshot of the rest.

"Look here, Clifford," he said quietly. "Candidly, I'm beginning to feel that you may not be altogether fit to drive on Saturday." He lifted a hand and stilled Cliff's protest. "Be honest about it. You can stand out from this race and not take a wheel again until you're ready. It's better to do that than to risk piling yourself up."

"I'm all right, and I know what you're thinking!" Unconsciously, Cliff raised a hand to the scar. "I was out to go round in faster time than anybody had put up this morning, and I think I should have come somewhere near it. I shan't let you down on Saturday, I promise that."

"Cliff, I know you're game, and I know you'll do your best, but if anything happened to you I should feel responsible." Mr. Leigh rubbed his chin and added: "Well, we'll see. It's all rather difficult. Anyhow, we'll get the parts across for your machine."

CHAPTER III.

CRAFT.

THE French Grand Prix circuit at La Chapelle roused to the last morning's practice. With the first gray touch of dawn hammers began to clatter at almost every corner as blue-bloused workmen started the hurried completion of private grand stands, the foundations of which were often camouflaged farm-carts, while the benches were probably scrubbed timbers stripped from barn and stable interiors and which would be carefully replaced after the race.

The Frenchmen worked like demons on these little stands, while their women stood around and schemed ways of positioning still more seats on the doubtful structures. Every seat meant either ten, fifty or one hundred francs, according to whether the purchaser was a Frenchman, an Englishman or an American.

This final practice on the day before the race was different from any other. Almost all the drivers turned out, but not necessarily on their Grand Prix machines because they did not want to spoil their tune. Quite a number of drivers came out in fast sport machines, familiarizing themselves with the turns and bends and the patches of road surface which were likely to break up.

Cliff used a worn-looking Fleet speed model, the hack car of the camp. He drove with Joyce at his side, and this was actually the first time they had been alone together since the arrival of the replacements for his wrecked car.

"Schiferly says he'll have my machine ready some time this afternoon," Cliff commented as they toured on. "But there won't be time to test it, because all cars have to be handed over to the officials by five o'clock to-day."

"I can never understand why that has to be done," Joyce answered. "All they do is lock the cars up over-night and give them back again in the morning."

"They check weights and measurements," Cliff told her. "The bodies

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have to be broad enough to take a mechanic, even though none rides. There are all kinds of regulations."

Both glanced back as another auto came roaring up from behind. It was Baird's Fleet, and in the moment that they saw him he was leaping from the crest of a switchback in the road.

They glimpsed daylight under the thrashing wheels, saw the puffs of dust when the tires touched the road again, saw the momentary lurch of the machine, then it was rocketing past, its speed defeating their eyes as they tried to pick up the car's outlines.

"IT'S Baird!" Joyce exclaimed.

Cliff saw that the hood was up, and that Baird's face was lowering as he gazed at the power unit. He glanced at them when the hack machine stopped and they leaped out and ran toward him.

"Do you want any help?" Cliff asked.

"I've seized up!" Baird turned to him. "She seized solid as I was going to take the corner! I damned near went into that arrow they've got there." He seemed to spit the words, his tone vicious.

"Shall I swing her over for you?" Cliff asked, and moved to the front of the car, but Baird caught his arm.

"I've tried that!" he exclaimed. "Anyhow, I'm not going to chance running the machine under its own power after this. Can you tow me onto the pits?"

"Of course."

Before the two cars had crawled half a mile from the town the reserve car came up from behind, piloted by Andrews. He slowed as he recognized Baird's machine and ran alongside, inquiring the trouble, then shot ahead with the news.

Cliff saw Berkeley West, Mr. Leigh and the rest craning out of the replenishment pit when he drove up at the end of the five-mile run, and the team manager tumbled over the plank as they stopped.

"Is it oil failure?" he snapped at Baird.

"Must be," the driver answered. "I was hitting it up along to Mont Camelin and—"

"Kennedy, will you tow him on to the camp?" West barked. "This is bad!" He clambered into the seat behind Cliff and Joyce, while mechanics from the pit went on foot toward the camp.

"This would have to happen at the last minute," West growled in Cliff's ear as he started off again. "It's wonderful the way some blasted thing always goes wrong before a man can get his team to the start."

LIGHTS were blazing in the warehouse when they arrived. Schiferly and Plug and their men were still working on Cliff's car, but they came running out when Berkeley West bawled for them. Baird stood by and watched Cliff free the tow rope, while Schiferly was told what had happened.

The foreman jumped for the crank handle and put his weight on it. The motor turned over fairly easily, although he had to use his strength against the high compression. He called Plug to help him, and they swung the engine together, the foreman with his head cocked on one side, listening.

"Sounds O. K.! No dryness anywhere," he called.

"She sounded dry enough on that corner," Baird answered grimly.

"We can't run any risks, Schiferly."

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West pulled out a handkerchief and mopped it across his forehead. "We've got to make sure this motor is all right for to-morrow. If it seized up just now it may do so again during the race, if we leave it. You'll have to strip it right down and try to find out what caused it—and have it ready for the official examination this afternoon."

"But it feels O. K. to me," Schiferly protested. "And I've got our Number One to finish."

"I can't help that. Stop work on it and get busy on this. You'll have to use every man we've got if you're going to do it in the time."

Schiferly looked from Berkeley West to Cliff, then looked at the team manager again.

"If you say so, I'll go ahead," he said slowly.

"Sorry, Kennedy!" Berkeley West turned to Cliff. "But it can't be helped."

Cliff nodded slowly, beginning to realize just how this development concerned himself. If the mechanics had to turn to Baird's car, all work must cease on his own—and his Fleet would not be finished in time to go to the starting line.

He glanced at Baird, but the other driver was not looking at him.

"I'm not working on any car except ours!" Plug suddenly stalked to where Cliff stood, and his underlip stuck out, while his grimy face thrust forward.

"We can work on it together, but we'll never have it ready before the inspection," Cliff said.

"We can bloomin' well try, can't we?" Plug demanded. "And if she ain't finished when we hand her over, we can get her out good and early in the morning and have another go." He glared at Cliff, and went on: "Don't tell me that we've worked all day an' 'arf the night just to be ditched now."

"I'll lend a hand, too," Joyce offered. Her eyes were alight and she looked up into Cliff's face, one hand resting on his arm. "You know what you said at the works," came her whispered reminder. "You've got to race!"

"You're right—and I will! Come on, Plug."

From the corner of his eye, Franklin Baird watched the three hurry into the French warehouse.

FROM a veranda at the back of the Hôtel Chapelle, Joyce looked on deserted lawns and empty paths, arching arbors and flower beds decked with little stone statues which glimmered in the shrouding dusk.

She had helped on Cliff's car as much as she was able. She had been present when the still unfinished machine was weighed in, and she knew that Cliff had dumped tools in the official garage, ready to start work the instant the car could be taken over again in the morning.

A footstep crunched on the dusty boards and she turned quickly, to frown when she saw that it was not Cliff who had come through the door along the veranda. It was Franklin Baird; his hooked nose stuck from his shadowed face like a beak and she saw his white teeth shine as he smiled, coming toward her in a manner which showed that he had expected to find her there.

"Tired?" he asked. "How did you like being a racing mechanic?"

The balcony creaked as he leaned backward against it, hitching his elbows over the rail and looking sideways at her.

The light caught his features now, fresh-shaven and smooth in their hard-

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ness. For the first time she noticed how long was his upper lip, and how deeply graven were the lines which ran from the corners of his mouth.

"It wasn't too bad," she said. "But I didn't do much except pass tools to them." She laughed as she imitated the orders which had been barked at her: "'Gimme a five-eighths—where's that shifter?—Tommy bar up!'"

Baird glanced at her. "It's hard luck that Cliff'll never get his machine to the start."

"But he will!" Joyce exclaimed.

"I doubt if he can do it in time." Baird shook his head. "I hope he doesn't, for his own sake. He isn't fit enough yet."

Joyce made no comment. Baird had the voice and the strivingly casual manner of one who talked from a motive that he would have hidden. He wanted something, and an intuitive flash told her what it was: herself.

He was, in his cold, hard way, in love with her. She could read in his mind, now, the idea that if he took Cliff's place as team leader, he would take with her the place that Cliff held. The team leader invariably had orders to go as fast as the fastest, and so carried the intangible halo which surrounds a man labelled as the best of his crew.

Her silence forced him to go on.

"I've seen them," he said. "There was Camelli—he crashed at Monza." Baird turned to her now. "He started to lose hold all round—drink, and the rest of it. He went down like a man sliding on a slope, snatching at anything to hold himself back. They do, until they lose hope and let go."

"Oh," and Joyce nodded slowly. She prompted him, curious. "And you think that Cliff—"

"You can't tell," Baird said. "But I'm sorry for him—dashed sorry. He's been a good man." He leaned toward her, and said suddenly: "But I'm jealous of him."

"Jealous?" Joyce felt her heart leap, while he bent closer, and his hand touched hers as it rested on the balcony rail.

"Because you're nicer to him than to me," she heard him saying. "Because you—" He broke off, watching her face.

Never before had Joyce really studied Baird's features. She knew that, in a moment, he would try to kiss her and she quailed at the thought of those lean, thin lips on her own.

He saw her eyes widen, astonished distaste in their depths. His smile faded, then he drew back, straightening abruptly as the door behind them creaked open.

CLIFF stepped on to the veranda, half checking when he saw Baird coming upright, and caught the expression on Joyce's face. Baird turned, saw him and smiled.

"Hello!" he greeted. "How's—the car progressing?"

"Pretty well." Cliff spoke shortly as he came toward them. "We'll finish it off in the morning, and I'll be riding to-morrow."

"Yes?" Baird asked. "Still, you won't attempt to travel as Number One now, will you?"

Cliff gazed at him, trying to fathom what had been passing between him and Joyce.

"Why not?" he asked. "The car will be sound, and I can make the pace with it, all right."

"You didn't do it in practice!" Baird's thin grin added sting to his words.

"And you don't want to see me do

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it on the road!" Cliff's voice came quickly, and Baird stiffened against the rail.

"I beg your pardon?" he protested.

Joyce caught her breath as she watched them facing one another, eye to eye, and she saw Cliff's fists bunching.

"Aw, don't be polite," he growled. "Baird, what was the idea of saying that your motor had seized up this morning?" Cliff's voice had a cut to it. "Neither Schiferly nor any of the mechanics could find anything wrong—not even a speck of burned oil!"

"What!"

Baird's eyes widened. He saw the scar caught by the light, standing out against Cliff's temple and cheek and heard his incisive voice saying:

"You've been knocking me ever since I came back into the team, haven't you? You don't want to see me ride!"

"Your nerve's gone and—"

"And so you faked a seized-up motor to get the mechanics off my machine and put me out of the race!" Cliff broke in. "That was very considerate."

"I'm not going to stand for this, Kennedy!"

"Then hadn't you better go?" Cliff looked into Baird's smoldering eyes.

The other driver sucked in his breath and turned to Joyce.

"I don't understand what he—"

"Please, Mr. Baird," Joyce said, and her voice shook.

Baird frowned. "I'll see you later, Kennedy," he muttered, and strode away. Not until the door had slammed behind him did Cliff move to face Joyce.

"I'm sorry about that," he said. "What was he saying to you just now? Or ought I to ask?"

"I think he would have tried to—kiss me, if you hadn't come," Joyce answered hesitantly.

"Oh!" His fists clenched again. "Well, when my nerve is as sound as his, I might—"

"Whatever your nerve is like doesn't make any difference to me, you must know that by now."

She touched his arm, half-smiling.

"Thank you for that," and he pressed her hand in both his own. "But it makes all the difference in the world to me."

After a moment, his voice came slowly from his shadowed face:

"You're too wonderful really to want any one who's only half a man."

CHAPTER IV.

OUTLAW!

THE clear, cool sunshine of very early morning lit the front of the Garage de la Place Centrale on the day of the French Grand Prix. Actually, the garage was anything but central, being at the side of La Chapelle most remote from the circuit.

The big double doors stood half open. Two gendarmes guarded the entrance, smoking caporal cigarettes and chatting to three Grand Prix officials. Beyond them it was possible to see the twenty-five machines entered for the race, neatly parked in two rows down the center of the huge building.

On the cobbles outside the garage, Plug Sparkes and old Dan Schiferly gazed resentfully into the building. They could see Cliff's auto, with a pile of tools before it; they had come down to finish off the machine, but they could not get into the garage until the official time for the racing autos to be returned to the teams.

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Cliff was at one side with Joyce, white racing overalls bundled under his arm and goggles in his pocket. He wore an old flannel suit and a sweater and canvas shoes. He had only to don his overalls to be ready to drive, and he planned to take the car straight from the garage into the race.

He had discussed with Schiferly exactly what remained to be done on the machine. The foreman estimated that they would finish just half an hour before the start and, overnight, he had cleared a bench in a corner of the garage so that the Fleet could be rushed to it and work begun the moment the officials permitted it.

"Get ready, sir!" Plug's hoarse voice broke in as the garage doors were swung wide.

A Frenchman came out with a watch in his hand, and Cliff fished for the release papers of his auto. He had them ready when the official suddenly beckoned to him.

Schiferly and Plug went with a rush, Joyce and Cliff following. Cliff raced to the table and smacked the papers down, then leaped toward his auto. Joyce dragged away the tools, hauling them toward the bench, while the others kicked clear the chocks under the auto's wheels and rolled it to the corner.

One minute later the four had lifted the motor-hood and the body—neither of which had been secured—and the work against time had started.

Joyce remained by the bench, passing tools as the others called for them and taking back those with which they were finished. It was Schiferly who gave orders, working on a minute-saving plan he had schemed out.

Almost at once mechanics arrived to collect the cars for other teams. Soon the big garage was echoing to shouts and calls, to the roar of racers being started up, and to the rumble of autos brought to tow them out.

AT the end of an hour Berkeley West arrived with Baird and Andrews, the reserve man. They were accompanied by mechanics, and Berkeley West came over to Cliff.

"How are things going?" He surveyed the car and the three panting, sweating men.

"We'll be on the line," Schiferly called to him.

"We'll do it, if we have to work on the way there," Cliff added.

"Leigh says that if you're not at the pits when the machines line up, Andrews rides in your place." West's voice was curt.

"I know that," Cliff answered.

Berkeley West turned away. The other Fleets were being warmed up when Andrews came over. He was a spare little man, quick in his movements.

"Think you can do it?" the Englishman asked, and his manner was friendly.

"Look here, Andrews," Cliff straightened. "I don't want to cut you out of the race, but I do—"

"Don't consider me at all." Andrews smiled as he offered his hand. "I'm bursting to ride, of course. But I'll stand down for you, and be glad to do it!" He gripped Cliff's fist and went on: "Honestly, I mean that. I suppose there's nothing I can do to help you now?"

"Only tell Leigh that I'll be there—and make him understand that I mean it!" Cliff replied, and turned back to his work.

The great building emptied of its cars save for the one lone Fleet. When the watchers saw Schiferly and Plug

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start to lift back the narrow body they realized that the job was almost done, and a dozen hands aided the pair.

The body was bolted home, Plug squirming about on his back against the concrete floor, Schiferly with him. Men helped Joyce to fill the tank with a special gasoline which had been brought there in cans. Oil was slung in, and the time for the start was barely thirty minutes away when the motor hood was strapped down and Plug's massive fist wrapped about the crank handle.

"She's yours, sir!" he roared exultantly to Cliff, and his bulky features spread as he grinned.

"Just half an hour to go." Schiferly glanced at his watch, the light glinting on his gray hair. "We've done it!"

"Then warm her up, and I'm off." Cliff reached for his overalls, while Joyce whipped them off the bench ready for him.

The foreman bent over the cockpit, setting the controls. Plug swung the engine, and half the crowd applauded when his tough muscle beat the terrific compression and the power unit fired.

Joyce helped to fasten the slender straps of Cliff's abdominal belt; it was a broad, corset-like thing which constricted stomach and lower ribs, to escape the nausea which the bumping of the car at speed would otherwise bring.

He pulled on his overalls, buckling cuffs and ankle straps. He slid three clean pairs of goggles around his neck and snatched up his crash helmet, by which time Schiferly had throttled the motor down to a steady roar.

"All ready for you, sir," Plug called.

"Darned good work." Cliff smiled as he spun to his mechanic. "You'd better come up to the pits with me. How will you get up there, Schiferly?"

"Don't mind me, I'll manage somehow," the foreman answered. "You're in the race now, sir! Make a good showing!"

"I won't let you down." Cliff slid over the edge of the cockpit. "And I'll never forget all you've done, Schiferly. O. K. everywhere?"

"Cliff, I'm riding on the tail!" Joyce swung over the rear of the machine, clinging to the back of the cockpit and to the quick-release cap of the gasoline tank. "I can hang on."

"Come in beside me." Cliff turned his head.

"No, don't change over now."

Plug was already in the machine, crouching beside his driver—there was no proper seat for a mechanic. The motor boomed, the crowd pressed back and the auto swung, skidding on the oily concrete, with men running into the Place Centrale to clear the way.

THE streets of La Chapelle were almost empty. Half of them carried *"Sens interdit"* signs, but to these "no entry" warnings Cliff paid no heed, and the *agents de police* did not dare stop a racing auto.

The Fleet approached the circuit by a road which was almost blocked at the far end by a grand stand built squarely across it.

Behind the stand were parked massive *camions*, vans which had brought French soldiers up to guard the course; the poilus were now stationed around it. Two of them stood, with gendarmes on duty, by a barrier at the side of the temporary stand; they lowered the bar when they saw the auto coming, and Cliff swung onto the broad, empty course, heading for the main stands and replenishment pits.

Machines were being marshalled for the start, in front of the main grand

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stand. Two bands tried to make strident music heard through the hooting in packed car parks behind the enclosures, and batteries of loudspeakers gave the crowd details of the coming race.

Everywhere was color. The orderly row of replenishment depots showed as black openings above long banners splashed with vivid advertisement lettering; each pit had its own colored sign and from the tin roofs more advertisements glared.

As a background to the clamor of bands, motor horns, loudspeakers and the shouts of marshals, sounded the voice of the crowd; a chattering, excited twittering which rose to broad peaks of sound as thousands of people commented at the same time on something out on the course, and just as suddenly dropped back to the ceaseless, uneven blatter of a moment before.

Only one car remained in front of the Fleet pit, and Cliff heard Joyce call as she saw it:

"That's Mr. Andrews. The others have gone up."

Mechanics in rival pits craned out and stared as the Fleet rolled on, to stop behind Andrews's car. Opposite, the crowd applauded.

Joyce slid off the tail of the machine, flicking open the cap of the gasoline tank so that it could now be filled to the brim. Plug pitched himself out, flinging up the hood, ready to change the spark plugs in case those already in the motor had become sooted up during the comparatively slow run through the town.

Andrews came from the side of his auto, joining Cliff where Mr. Leigh bent over the plank.

"I stand out!" the reserve driver exclaimed. "I'm glad you got here, Kennedy."

"Thanks, I'll give you a buttonhole out of the winner's bouquet—if I get it." Cliff laughed, his eyes alight now. In ten minutes the autos would be sent away, but he'd be with them when the flag dropped. "I'm O. K. to run, Mr. Leigh," he reported to the designer.

"That's good, Clifford," Mr. Leigh nodded. "The others are already at the start." He added slowly: "I have given Baird instructions to ride as Number One."

"As Number One!" Cliff stared. Plug, behind him, caught the words and turned, gazing with his underlip sticking out before he went on with his work.

"Yes. You'll ride as Number Three," Mr. Leigh said quietly.

Number Three had to run to pit signals, trailing the rest, standing no chance unless the other two fell out.

"But, dad, Cliff's been our Number One all along!" Joyce leaped toward the plank, slinging a half-filled churn of gasoline onto the board after refilling the tank. "You can't stop him leading the team now!"

"He will ride as our Number Three—or not at all," the designer answered steadily.

"Because of this?" Cliff's voice quivered as he touched his scar. "Because you think I haven't the nerve and that I'll let you down, is that it?"

He got no answer.

HE saw Berkeley West glowering at him from over Mr. Leigh's shoulder. The mechanics were staring, and Cliff realized that his sudden burst of temper was not in consonance with calm nerve. He flung away from the pit to the car again, sliding into the cockpit while Plug locked the motor hood.

"It's rotten, Cliff." Joyce leaned

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over the side, her eyes blazing. "Ride close up to Baird, and I'll try and persuade dad to signal you to go ahead of him. It's a shame, after all your work."

"Our work." Cliff looked toward the starting line; drivers were returning to their autos after the reading of the racing rules. "I've got to get there now. Joyce, thanks for—for everything!"

She smiled. She pressed his hand, then stepped away as Plug called:

"Get going now, sir!"

The big mechanic bunched himself at the tail, and Joyce bent with him. They rolled the car forward in a push-start, and when the motor fired Plug pitched across the tail, clinging there while Joyce dropped behind.

More applause came from the crowd and the enclosures, and Cliff's number went on the scoreboard as a starter. Marshals signalled madly as he approached the starting line, waving the car into position.

The autos were lined up in three rows with eight cars in each. Out in front, alone, was the twenty-fifth machine, piloted by the driver who had won the race the previous year. The Fleet team was at one end of the middle row, and Cliff was sent to the last place in the line.

Mechanics were grouped about the machines, starting them up. Blued smoke scurried from spanging exhausts, while Cliff climbed to the ground and moved around his Fleet on a final inspection.

"Everything's O. K., and she's running like a clock." Plug listened to the beat of the throttled engine, then turned to Cliff and went on: "But you're not riding as any Number Three in this race, sir!"

His jaw set, his fists bunched.

"Those were my orders, Plug."

"Blast orders, you ain't taking 'em, sir. You won't get a look-in unless the other two crack up—and then you'll be so far behind that you won't be able to do anything."

"I'll show you what I'm going to do," Cliff answered, and strode toward Baird's car.

Baird looked up as he came. He regarded Cliff watchfully, his hooked nose seeming drawn down, his thin lips barely visible above the canvas mask which would protect his mouth from dust during the race.

"Baird, I hear you're scheduled to ride as our Number One," Cliff said.

"That's so," Baird nodded shortly.

"I see." Cliff smiled suddenly. "Well, there are going to be two Number Ones for the Fleet team in this race, my friend. Understand me?"

Baird stared blankly.

"I'm going to take my chance of winning," Cliff added. "I'll ride as an outlaw—and I'm going to drive until my machine blows up."

"Yes?" Baird drawled the word. "You'll race against me, instead of backing me, is that it? Well, that 'll suit me."

His glance was on the scar, where the webbing of Cliff's chin-strap made a white line as it crossed his cheek.

"That 'll suit me," Baird repeated, and climbed into his auto.

CHAPTER V.

FEAR.

FLAGS and bunting on the grand stand dappled the road with moving shadows as the waiting machines thundered at the starting line, their colors hazed by oil-smoke that slugged from crackling exhausts.

Famous names were in the line-up:

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Alfa-Romeo and Delage, Bugatti, Mercédès and two cars from Austria, which looked like wheeled rainbows with their white bodies and red numbers and shining black frames. Beside the three Fleets quivered a trio of vicious-looking Maseratis: straight eights, with staggered radiators and low-hung bodies which were flaming red. Wickedly fast were these speed-irons from Bologna.

There were two Alfa-Romeos immediately in front of Cliff, with three green-painted British Talbots flanking them—slender-bodied autos with growling, grumbling exhausts that leaped to a crackling, menacing bark as the drivers revved their engines. Cliff peered past the Alfas, sucking his breath through gritted teeth and watching the lonely figure of the starter, who held up the French tricolor.

Cliff's hands were rammed against the tape-bound rim of his steering-wheel, ready to whip the machine outward in an effort to get past the twin Alfas the moment the flag came down. He was bent in his narrow seat, trying to still the quaking nerves that trembled above his stomach. He reminded himself that he always felt like this in the long moments before the start. He told himself that it would pass—but he knew that it would not.

Somewhere inside of him there was something which was not as it had been before his big crash. There was a little patch of fear which wanted to spread and spread and envelop his whole body and make him run from his car and all that lay before it. It wanted to rise up and grip his heart in fingers of ice, and lift higher to touch his brain and numb it with terror.

He knew that he must fight it. He knew that the patch was going to make itself apparent in the moments when the danger was greatest and his own resistance weakest. He knew that the only way to get rid of it was to burn it out in the heat and smother of what lay ahead.

Already it had robbed him of the little honor he had held amongst the Fleet men; it had pushed him back into the place of Number Three, and was trying to push him out of the game altogether.

"Blast them!" Trembling lips quivered the words. "I'll give them a race. I'll crack Baird up if he tries to ride with me. I'll—" He pulled himself up and muttered: "No, that won't do."

That was silly, talking to himself and getting excited. He'd got to keep calm, quiet, steady. With his mouth open, still watching the flag, a little groan broke deep in his throat.

For a moment he considered the consequences of what he meant to do. He would be disobeying team orders, and would be ruined if he failed. In the motor-racing world the finest thing that can be said of a driver is that he did as he was told, that he answered his pit signals and drove as he was ordered to drive—because it is very easy not to do so.

Cliff knew that the chances against success were many. If they proved too many for him, men would understand exactly what he had tried to do, and the story would get around that he had attempted to come back and had not done it. But if he won, everything would be all right; the victor is always forgiven.

HE saw the flag twitch. The fabric came down in an abrupt and streaking blur. The Fleet's motor roared, tires screeched as they spun for grip against the road surface, and

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the machine surged forward, every other car moving with it.

With their moving there came on the air one enormous blast of sound which blotted out everything else: the full-blooded bellow of super-tuned machines challenging their fellows, defying the destiny hidden in the circuit ahead.

Team-leaders jockeyed through the plunging pack, streaks of livid color that kicked faint dust from the road. Bunched, howling, they left the rest behind, duelling for the lead, and a white Mercédès snatched it on the curve beyond La Chapelle—to lose it when Cliff came up inside him.

His ears were full of the roaring of his machine as it swept on in gear. He saw a green English Talbot challenge and fall away, then he had his Fleet in front—first through the curves that followed, and ahead on the run down to Faveurre, beating the German when he spurted for the railway arch outside the town.

The arch passed overhead, echoes chasing the auto with a swooping, blurred roar, and in front Cliff saw the buildings which hid wicked corners.

Misty faces were banked up on the little stands between them, black windows looked dully down. He saw the sandbags and palisades on the first corner — gendarmes — men pressed back into doorways—blank walls of unyielding stone at which his auto was pitching.

Mercédès and Talbot were coming behind, chasing him, forcing him on, hounding him toward a speed too great to make this first turn. "Brake—brake—brake!" he told himself—and still held his foot from the pedal, though every nerve strove to make him slow down and take the turn in easy safety.

When he did use his brakes he crashed them on, so that the narrow body of the machine slammed down on its springs, while the jolting wheels hammered the road as the car yawed.

The supercharger's shriek slid above the boom of the engine when Cliff changed gear and braked again, body twisted as his arm went over the side and wrenched the hand-brake back until the resistance of the brake-shoes was solid.

The auto slewed, tail coming round. The sandbags outside the turn appeared to lean over and hurl themselves at him, the wall of the building above them teetered, rocking insanely. Only his brain was steady amongst things that tossed and swung.

Only his brain was steady in the paralysis of terror which clutched him as he realized that he had come into the turn too fast and could never make it —and yet he *did* make it!

In that veriest fraction of time when kicking the throttle open could slide the car to where the course was wide in the square beyond the corner, his natural judgment and instinctive action saved him.

Still slithering, the Fleet scrambled from disaster, and on the gray surface of the road it left broad, black streaks where rubber had been torn from the tire-treads; streaks that smoked and were instantly hidden by the cars that leaped up from behind.

Accelerating, heart-pounding, Cliff sent the machine across the square, and a half-skid on the last corner in the town made the spectators cower back; then he was clear of the buildings and stamping the throttle wide open for the run to Camelin.

His lower lip smarted. The briny tang of blood was on his tongue. His teeth had nicked his lip on the corner,

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in the jolting. He mustn't take a turn like that again. Skidded—that was bad! It lost time and took it out of the tires.

He felt his heart thumping. His cheeks were hot, and yet he knew that there was no color in them. Right down inside him was the nagging fear that had swelled up at Faveurre, which had drained the color from his face and had made him want to duck in the cockpit to save himself.

Only he had beaten it, somehow. If once that dread mastered him it would wreck the car and kill him as well. So he must fight it—and the way to do that was with the throttle wide open and to the devil with all thought of disaster.

THE Englishman had dropped away now, and a red Maserati was with the white Mercédès. Behind these two was Baird, and, close enough to take the grit and stones from his stamping rear wheels, rode the Talbot and a Bugatti.

Six machines fighting for leadership on this first lap. Team leaders striving to set a speed which would crack their rivals, even though their own motors burst in doing it.

The road shook as they swung up Mont Camelin, hitting it with a mad roar. Cliff had steadied now. He knew only the keen lightness of head that comes in answer to the leaping of a racing auto on an open road.

The six bunched through Camelin-sous-Soucy, flinging at the turn. The Mercédès cornered as though it was on rails, radiator nibbling at the Fleet's tail. Outside it, the Maserati's vivid red shape slid, fell away, then came again as they cleared the bend for the three-mile run to the St. Jean hairpin.

Cliff led them still. Through his rear-view mirror, set under the bulge of the scuttle, he got a hint of the machines behind; just a hazy cloud of smoke and dust, with dark shapes leaping in the blur.

His gaze riveted to the tapering road. It was a streaky gray ribbon that slithered beneath his gobbling front wheels, tilting flatly with the bucking of his car from bumps.

He felt his mount pulling, hurling him on, a mettlesome thing that scudded ahead of the chasing pack. The gray roofs of St. Jean, turned to silver in the sunshine, rose out of the trees almost before he expected it, and he began to time his approach to the difficult turn, his whole body straining.

If he could be leading past the pits on this first lap, it would show those in the Fleet depot how little meaning there was in the scar that he carried. To hold the lead meant taking this corner desperately fast. The loss of half a second would put the Mercédès in front, because that low white car was built for speedy work on the turns.

The buildings, the banners, the staring faces that were gray, blurred ovals—all appeared to lift and rock to meet him as he braked, then changed down with the straight-through, open-throttle movement of the racing driver, so that the exhaust coughed one fighting roar which was instantly lost in the mad whining of gears.

He felt the Fleet weaving on the road under the checking shoes that hit the brake-drums. The axles kicked as the wheels stamped, and again he shifted gear.

Hand and foot-brakes went on, driven to the limit, and the crowd saw the dust fly as the auto skidded into the heart of the bend. Wrenched tires strained against their rims. Their protesting scrowling sounded through all

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the roaring of the auto—then a rear tire burst.

Cliff heard it go. His mouth opened and his breath caught in a choking gasp, while nerve and muscle whipped to tension as the machine's tail slid outward. He bore on the steering, riding into the skid, fighting it. The tire was torn away, the bared wheel-rim grated on the road, then he had the car under control.

The Mercédès flashed past him and the red shape of the Maserati, skidding, pitched at the lamed Fleet, for the Italian to straighten and miss its wagging tail by saving inches.

Cliff, hugging the outside of the curve, saw Baird go by. The Talbot and the Bugatti passed, all of them slashing road-spume over the Fleet's radiator.

Slowing, he looked over the side. He saw that the tire had been wrenched to the inside of the wheel; it had spun about the brake-drum in a tangled mass of split and smoking rubber, locking the brake on. He pulled up.

HOT rubber was fuming, shreds of red inner-tube twisted against the black of the cover. He wrenched at it with his hands, the near-crash forgotten as he thought only of the vile luck of the thing which had put him out of the speed-duel. The tire was jammed solidly, burning to his touch.

Two cars came through the curve, the air shuddering under the accelerated thunder of their exhausts. Cliff bent over the cockpit, dragging up his leather seat to reach the tools beneath it. There was nothing with which he could hack away the tire.

"A knife! Somebody lend me a knife!" He turned and shouted the words.

He had stopped at the end of the palisade, by a safety sandbank. Behind it two poilus stood, guarding the course, their rifles slung and their steel helmets winking in the sun.

"Lend me a bayonet!" Cliff reached toward them. "Bayonet!"

One of the French soldiers understood. His bayonet came rattling from its sheath and he passed it across the sand. Cliff dug the tip of the long blade under the hot rubber and jagged furiously.

Other machines stormed past him as he worked, chopping wildly, tearing at the tire with his free hand until, at last, he was able to drag the cover over the top of the wheel and drop it in a ragged mess of canvas and rubber to the road.

The inner tube came with it and the brake-rods were freed. He tossed the stained bayonet back, gasping his thanks, then dived into the car and was off, wheel-rim grinding.

That tire-burst had been like a blow in the face, a derisive flick of Fate's finger, just to show him how little he mattered and how little he could do in the race. It roused him, and the swift action in clearing the smoking, sticky rubber made him forget his fear.

He told himself that he wasn't out of the race yet. That he wasn't too far back to catch Baird and the rest again. He could make up the time lost if he drove in the way that he knew he could drive: like a man on the board tracks, throttle pedal down to the toe-grid, taking everything as it came, never easing up.

In front was the main straightaway which he should have been covering with the throttle wide open. He now whipped his auto to a mile a minute, and that was dangerously fast on a bare rim. If the wheel collapsed he would have to run on foot to the pits

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and back with a spare, and that meant losing all chance in the race.

No more cars passed him. All had gone ahead. He wondered how long he had been held up. Three, five minutes, maybe, and with every second the others were drawing away from him.

That Maserati was fast, he thought. It would get ahead of the Mercédès. The German had them all beaten for cornering, but the lighter autos had the edge on it down the straights.

He wondered what Baird was doing —laughing probably!

French soldiers lined the road at either side. Here and there were groups of gendarmes, stalls, and little camps under the trees. Spectators sat on the grass or stood, staring. Occasionally there was an empty stretch, save for the figure of a single poilu, lounging on his rifle.

But the crowd thickened toward the stands. Cliff saw the foot bridge over the road, which marked where the enclosures began, then the pits, and the Fleet rushed toward its own with the naked wheel-rim s c o r i n g the road under the brakes. Plug had seen it coming up, and he flung a jack under the back axle when the auto stopped, lifting it with one clean movement.

Cliff had a glimpse of Joyce's face as he leaped out and snatched a hammer from the pit plank. He raced around to the wheel, to smash at the quick release hub cap, spin it and lift the wheel away as Plug came with the spare. It was flung on. Cliff spun the cap back and left Plug to hammer it home.

"Who was leading?" he called, as he slid into the cockpit again.

"Maserati — Merc — T a l b o t — Baird!" the mechanic yelled to him. "Here they come again now!"

Cliff saw the four machines ripping down the straight, with the red Italian car leading. They were one behind the other, spinning wheels jerking on the road, and they went past with a furious, rushing roar that was momentarily stunning.

"All clear, sir!" Plug shouted.

Cliff heard Joyce call something. He had a glimpse of Berkeley West leaning over the plank and bawling. Mr. Leigh was gesticulating, but their words were lost in the roar of the Fleet as it went off—another bunch of cars coming up to pass it before it had cleared the pits.

It was passed again before it gathered speed, but the machine was running all out when Cliff went down to Faveurre—with the fastest cars in the Grand Prix a full lap, and more, ahead.

"LOOK at the way he's traveling!" Berkeley West's voice was almost awed as Cliff's machine came past the pits again.

Joyce heard the team manager while she craned out to watch the auto. She had the merest glimpse of Cliff sitting close up to the steering wheel, head tilted to one side to peer past the windshield, then the auto was only a sliding shape that vanished up the road.

"He's after 'em, miss." Plug turned, satisfaction on his face. "If he hadn't busted that tire he'd have been leading now."

"But he was told to ride as Number Three!" She looked at him quickly from where she sat at the end of the pit, apart from the rest.

"Yes, but he ain't!" Plug glanced at the others and lowered his voice. "You don't think a driver like him is going to be robbed of the race, do you? He must ha' been doing a hundred and thirty when he went by just now, and

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that don't look like he's waiting on chances, does it?"

He bent closer, and she heard him chuckle.

"Over on the line he told Mr. Baird that there'd be two Number Ones in this race."

"Mr. Kennedy isn't going to ride to orders?" Joyce stared, her eyes lighting up.

"He isn't," Plug answered. "If a Fleet car goes under the winner's flag, it'll be his!"

"And after bursting another tire—bravo, Cliff!" Joyce breathed.

Mr. Leigh and Berkeley West imagined that Cliff was riding hard merely to regain his place as Number Three in the team. At the end of an hour he was making his way through the leaders; they did not attempt to take the faster pace he was setting because they knew that, even when he had gone by, they were still a lap ahead.

All the cars with a chance of leadership were keeping a little in hand, a reserve of power and speed which none of them would use unless the issue of the race depended on it.

There were watchful eyes and clever brains in that long, dark line of tin-roofed replenishment depots. Stop watches were clocking all the while, and men were checking Cliff on every lap.

The moment that he came within striking distance even of challenging the leaders at his present speed, the cars ahead would be signalled to open up yet more and so keep him behind.

The race settled down. The dead car park began to take its toll. News of crashes came to the pits: a French car had overturned in Faveurre, an English machine had run off the road short of Mont Camelin.

The Maserati held its lead, with the Mercédès sitting close behind and Baird still in rear of him, but half a mile in front of the fourth car.

At half distance, signals called the leaders to the pits for fresh fuel and oil. Baird came in, to work with swift precision in company with his mechanic. His face and hands were masked by oil slung back from the motor. Grime darkened his teeth, and when he changed his goggles Joyce saw that his eyes were like slits.

"Where's Kennedy?" he jerked.

"Six minutes behind when you stopped," Berkeley West answered him.

Baird said nothing more before he went away, and as he vanished up the road the call for Cliff was hung out. Joyce helped Plug to set fuel and oil ready for him, and they sighted the car when it was still a long way from the straight.

It seemed to skim the road, and not until the last possible moment did Cliff use his brakes, stopping with locked wheels and sliding tires dead in front of the pit.

Ever since he had restarted, Cliff had been catching up on the leaders, which meant that he had been pushing his Fleet over the circuit faster than any of them.

His anger at the delay had long since gone. The qualms which had been with him at the beginning of that first mad lap had stilled, replaced by a fierce intentness in which he had taken every turn and every bend with the trained precision of a true speedman, tires pitching over the same spot on each lap.

HE had driven hard, but he had taken no avoidable chances, satisfied gradually to close up on the leaders, that he might be ready to jump and challenge them when the race was

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almost ended. He knew that his hour —his testing time—was yet to come.

That his Fleet should have stood up to the flogging he had given it was a tribute to Schiferly and Plug, and to its designer. Proud autos were standing, oil-smudged and dusty and beaten, about the grassy verges of the circuit, with smashed motors, cracked by the pace which the leaders were setting, and which Cliff was even then beating.

Driving as he had done had taken its toll. Bent and nerveless legs quivered when his shoes hit the ground as he came from the auto, and his scorched feet were like feelingless lumps of wood, save for the dull pain where the heat of the motor had seared them.

Joyce saw that his face was gray from dust, which lay deep about his nostrils and in his ears. The fresh white enamel of his crash helmet had been chipped by flying stones and scored by grit flung from the wheels of machines which he had passed. His hands trembled from the strain of driving as he snapped open the quick release cap of the gasoline tank, and his voice was husky when he called:

"I've just passed our Number Two on the St. Jean road—abandoned—engine trouble!" His tone was grim and harsh.

"Abandoned?" Mr. Leigh's voice was startled.

"Yes. Clock my stop!"

"I'm doing that." Joyce called the words as loudly as she could, that they might pierce the speed-born deafness which she knew gripped his ears.

"Where's Baird?"

"Third," she answered. "Fifty seconds behind the Maserati. Mercédès is still between them. Alfa-Romeo fourth."

Cliff crashed a huge funnel into the opening of the petrol tank and began to sling in churns of gasoline, four gallons at a time, blue-tinged from dope.

"Only Baird and me left in, now!" Joyce heard him exclaim, then Plug called as he attended to oil and water:

"You were six minutes behind when you came in, sir. You've got two hundred miles to go now."

"How's Baird running?"

"Like a clock. He's to get the all-out signal ten laps from the finish—but he won't catch that Italian!" He laughed under the motor hood.

"Plug, if I'm not gaining fast enough three laps from the finish, give me that signal as well!" Cliff told him hoarsely.

"You can't do better than you're doing now, sir."

"Can't I?" Cliff pitched the last churn back, flung the funnel over the plank, and snapped down the tank cap.

"A drink?" Joyce called.

He snatched at the glass and drank while she talked on:

"You've stopped nearly two minutes—that puts you eight behind the Maserati, Cliff. We'll time you. You'll get him!"

"What's this?" Berkeley West bent over behind her. "You ride to my signals now, Kennedy!"

"You go to the devil!" Cliff glared at him, lips wet from the liquid in the glass. "I'm riding my own race, and Baird can't win it for you. He'll never get by those other two." He drank again. "They'll be riding—*riding*, get me?—on the last laps, and it 'll be nerve that takes a car past them to the finish. I'll show you how much I've got of it."

The glass smashed as he set it down on the plank with hands that were numbed from fighting the kicking steering wheel.

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"Joyce, you signal me!" He ripped the words. "Schiferly, we worked together to give me the chance to win—so if they won't let you signal from here, go to the end of the pits. I'm out to win, West, blast you—I'll show you if I'm a scalded pup!"

"O. K., sir." Plug howled the words as he strapped down the engine cover, and Cliff spun to the machine.

"I'm with you!" Schiferly bawled.

"Good luck, Cliff! You'll do it!" Joyce called.

He could see her eyes glowing, and her voice was breathless.

"Kick her wide open, sir." Plug bunched himself at the tail and began to push the machine while Cliff was yet climbing in. It gathered speed under the weight and strength of the big mechanic's body.

Cliff let up the clutch. The car almost stopped under the compression of the heated motor, then she fired and went away with her exhaust belching smoke, booming defiance at the men she left behind.

CHAPTER VI.

VALOR.

WHEN Cliff came past the grand stand nine laps later, every glance was on the scuttering shape of his bellowing car, and the voice of the crowd swelled. They had just seen all-out signals suddenly flown from Mercédès, Maserati, and Alfa-Romeo pits, and the spectators knew that it was because of the way this American car was being driven.

Cliff had the Fleet moving at the peak of its speed. The only way in which he could travel faster was by taking ugly risks on the corners, cutting them fine to save split seconds which would build up into whole seconds and grow from that into the minutes which meant miles.

His machine showed as a compact blue-and-white mass on blurred wheels which pecked the road-surface as they scudded the dust behind. From the sooty exhaust thin flame stabbed in spear-heads of dimmed orange, and tenuous smoke flung out to be swirled in the writhing air currents which followed the racing car.

His feet were numbed. His forearms were sore to the elbows under the ache of strained muscle. His body was bruised, racked and jarred under the pounding of the machine. But his brain was clear and acute still.

Always he watched for Baird's car, because he meant to finish in front of him, if he did nothing else. For once, the team leaders had not cracked up, which indicated that this Grand Prix was being run at a faster pace than any road race had yet known.

Cliff watched his pit each time he went by, looking for the all-out signal which would set him clipping the corners. If it came, three laps from the finish, it would mean that—according to calculations—he could not catch the men in front.

He tried to count the laps after his pit stop, but his mind was too full to retain the memory. He saw that the rival pits continued to fly their signals, but it seemed an age before, coming up the straight, he caught a flash of waving color at the Fleet pit.

He glimpsed Plug standing astride, holding high a short white pole topped by an orange triangle in which was a single red circle—the all-out signal.

At Plug's side, Joyce leaned over the plank with Schiferly, holding a board on which figures were chalked: "65." That meant he was sixty-five

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seconds behind the Italian; more than a minute to make up in the three last laps, with everything ahead of him traveling at the absolute limit.

He raised an arm and braced it against the weight of the wind to show that he had taken the signal.

Sixty-five seconds! He must be close to Baird.

Well, this was it. He huddled down in his narrow, hard little seat. The lower rim of the wheel was in his lap, almost on his thighs, and he sat so close to it that the insides of his forearms rapped against it, positioned to exert quick strength.

LA CHAPELLE fell away and where he had taken his Fleet through the bends to the Faveurre road with his tires scrabbing on the broken insides of the curves, he now took the bends with the tires screeching, half-skidding, the machine held only by the strength of his grip on the steering.

He cut inches off the curves, and went down to the town with the violent suddenness of a thunderbolt. He aimed his car for the opening under the railway arch, and was on the town before the spectators there realized that he had arrived.

They saw his car slide all over the road under the brakes, tail whipping in wicked skids, wheels jumping before he went through the first turn faster than any car had gone before.

He took every corner on the rest of that lap in the same way—wondering if his tires would hold, and stilling the thought as it came. A burst meant the finish at the speeds he was making, just as it had meant the finish for the burned-out wreck in front of Mont Camelin.

He had seen them carrying the driver away. He had seen flames turning the sleek machine into a blackened lump of fused metal. That would be his own fate if a tire failed him—but he did not slow.

"Scalded pup!" That be damned! He didn't want to die. He didn't want to finish inside a spinning, uncontrolled mass of howling metal that was battering itself to destruction—but he wasn't afraid.

He could dare the chance of it. He had the courage to take the risk, and he'd see what Baird was made of when he caught him.

The crowds at Faveurre were watching for him when he appeared again, expecting sensation. They got it in the way he came up with the machine howling, skittering, protesting. Torn road-surface spattered back, stones cracking like bullets against the palisades, and as he left Faveurre behind him he saw Baird.

He was on the switchbacks to Mont Camelin, and the Alfa-Romeo which had been riding fourth, was at his tail.

"Baird!" Cliff spoke the name exultantly behind clenched teeth, and saw that he was gaining on the two because of the speed with which he had taken the last corner in the turn.

The crackling snarl of the Alfa's exhaust rattled back at him. He surged past the Italian, and saw Baird glance across as he drew level. The Englishman's face expressed amazement for all its canvas mask below the beaked nose and, recognizing him, Baird stamped the throttle pedal flat, matching Cliff's speed.

THE three cars held together, rocking up to a hundred and twenty miles an hour on a road that was no more than thirty feet wide. They leaped from the crest of each slow rise, the two Fleets with their wheel hubs

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almost kissing, the roar of their engines and the piercing shriek of their superchargers so affrighting that spectators pressed back.

Cliff held the inside of Camelin hill and he gained up it. Ahead, he stormed on to Camelin-sous-Soucy, and the crowd in the stand on the corner rose to watch. The three arrived with a sudden shattering rush of sound, Cliff cutting the inside of the corner, exhaust s n a r l i n g as he accelerated through the turn.

He shaved the palisade, tail sweeping outward, denting when it smashed half a dozen staves. Woodwork flew high, then the car was straight and zooming down the center of the road, Baird still close behind, the Alfa-Romeo falling away.

"Still with me? Come on, then!" Cliff gasped as he sighted Baird in his rear-view mirror, and when his gaze focussed ahead again he sighted a dark shape in a pearly cloud of thin dust.

It was the Mercédès, going down to the St. Jean hairpin, and the two caught it short of the corner, just as the German began braking. Cliff didn't touch his brakes; he thundered past him.

Baird also passed the white car, and both weaved and swayed, skidding, braking, changing down. Officials on the palisades scampered for their lives, because it seemed that the machines could not get round.

Cliff saw the running, darting figures that shifted madly with heads bent and hands clawing the air. They were scared—and he was scared!

He knew why they ran. They thought he was going to wreck himself—and he was! He couldn't hold the car. He was trying too much. Going to smash himself up.

The fear that was inside him billowed up and spread. Fire burned in his throat, filling it—horrible. His heart swelled, and he felt himself panicking.

He fought against it, and beat it down. He was skidding—a tire might go! But he knew he was skidding—he meant to skid, and his tires would hold. He had done all this before and could do it again.

Hot fear faded. The crowd saw the Fleet slide sideways across the heart of the turn, to accelerate madly and set rear wheels scrabbing in the moment that it seemed he must go through the fence. His tires clawed at the foot of the safety sand bank, slashing stinging grains back at Baird, then Cliff was away, Baird with him, and the Mercédès bellowing angrily behind.

Blood was salty in Cliff's mouth again where his teeth had jagged his lower lip, as he fought through the hairpin turn. The blood trickled down his chin, to be caught by the wind and spread across his cheek, cold.

They hit the straight that ran to the stands and brought the beginning of the last lap. Both the German and Baird gained on Cliff down that stretch. His engine had been flogged and thrashed all through the race, and it had lost something of the tune which made for superlative speed down a straightaway.

EVERY man in the stands and pits was upright as the machines whirled past with Cliff leading by ten yards—a fifth of a second.

"He's only got the Maserati to beat!" Plug yelled.

"He'll get him!" old Dan Schiferly breathed, while Joyce clutched his arm, the color fading from her cheeks.

She watched them out of sight. She thought of Cliff driving madly onward,

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but she did not know just how madly he did drive, until afterward.

"Got to get the Italian—got to get him!" The idea beat through his mind, and he half forgot the two autos behind, striving to hold him.

Baird's thin lips were spitting curses when he pulled ahead of the German on the bends from La Chapelle. Cliff flew through them, skating from one side of the road to the other as he cut the curves, to go bolting down to Faveurre, passing three autos on the way.

On the first corner in Faveurre, Baird shot nearly level. Cliff saw him come up, and went with him across the square. The cars hurled at the corners, sliding, frenzied.

Cliff's machine jolted madly from every bump on the road, smashing him against the squab when the wheels hit the ground again. The car was a howling mass of straining mechanism that went up Mont Camelin in one tumultuous roar. At Camelin village it came skipping furiously to the corner with gears, engine and exhaust thundering triumph as the Maserati showed ahead, going through the turn.

Baird came level again and went through the corner with Cliff.

Both cockpits were an inferno of smoke and dust and reeking fumes as they pounded, fifty yards behind the Italian who held the lead. Cliff's hands were stiffened and crooked on the wheel, so that it seemed they could never come straight again. He was deaf, and his face burned. His tongue was like leather in his mouth, and his bruised shoulders were full of sullen, smoldering pain every time he was crashed back against the leather squab.

But that was the Maserati in front. Pass him, and the race was won—if he would yet beat Baird.

The fifty yards closed down to twenty, and halfway to St. Jean hairpin the two Fleets were close on the Italian's tail. Cliff knew that he had got to take the lead before the corner, or the Maserati might have speed enough to beat them both in the last run to the finish.

He jammed his numbed foot down on the grid, holding the throttle pedal down, hoping for a fraction more speed.

He saw the Italian kick off a bump, rear wheels over-running in thin air. That bump slowed the machine imperceptibly, but enough to allow the Fleets to flash level.

IN a welter of furious sound the three raced for the corner; the Italian knew what was passing him now.

Cliff knew that he must take this turn without skidding; a skid would lose him the fraction of a second.

He strained his ears through the uproar, but he did not hear the Maserati's brakes go on. To the crowd it seemed as though all three must rip straight ahead, to smash themselves up on the house fronts outside the curve.

Then the Italian braked and fell back. Cliff held to his own speed, calculating the yards to the turn, reckoning the last possible inch that he could travel before he braked—and Baird still came with him.

The palisade rushed to meet Cliff. He saw figures behind it, again running. He had an instantaneous hint of a poilu's face: the man was immediately in front, eyes and mouth wide, horror and fear on his face as the blue-and-white cars burst at him.

It was then that Cliff used his brakes furiously, and changed from top to second in one movement, his engine bellowing. The brakes caught the

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wheels again—slowing—slowing the car while Baird shot past him—tail flailing out—skidding!

Cliff saw him sliding. Beyond him he sighted the road opening up, and he jammed the throttle down, shooting into the hairpin past Baird's skidding machine, clearing the corner.

Baird was fighting his own car, and his heart went leaden as the machine tilted sideways, for the ground to come up and meet him. He had a glimpse of the Maserati lurching at him, the driver shouting, his goggled eyes black.

For one appalling moment death grinned over the road. The screech of locked brakes and the howl of straining tires were like demoniac laughter. Women hid their faces—then the tail of the Fleet came around, skidding evenly on, while the Italian whipped out and went by, scraping a sand bank.

Sliding still, the Fleet spun broadside to the road, the steering wheel twitching under Baird's n e r v e l e s s hands. It stopped aslant on the course, still right way up, just out of the turn.

The car was unhurt. Its tires were sound. Its engine was running, but at the wheel was a gray-faced man who clutched the rim with cold fingers and who, when he drove on, travelled slowly.

Cliff's Fleet was flirting the dust of the straightaway, exhaust chattering derisively back, tail wagging as the car boomed down the tree-lined road.

"Done it! I've done it!" The words croaked from bloodied lips. He thought of Joyce—Plug—Berkeley West, and then of Joyce again.

He looked over his shoulder. The Italian was well behind, and couldn't reach him now.

He strained his gaze to pick out the grand stands. He saw them and the pits, and a little group of men at the side of the road, opposite the scoreboard.

One of them was coming out, stepping as close to the approaching car as he dared. He held a staff high, and the French tricolor caught the sun.

The tricolor dipped as the Fleet came level, and Joyce saw Cliff duck his head to the winner's flag.

THE Grand Prix circuit lay empty under evening shadows, grand stands deserted and the crowds gone home.

In the gardens behind the Hôtel Chapelle, Cliff sat with Joyce. His hands were cramped and were still a little numbed. He ached, and he was desperately tired.

His ears rang yet from congratulations, and Baird was the only one who had not come near him. Baird had finished sixth, and he said that he had crawled to the flag because he was afraid that something might have given on the car after his skid.

The only thing that had given had been his nerve.

Berkeley West had taken Cliff aside and had shaken hands. And because, in his dour way, he was rather fine, he had said:

"I'm glad you did it, Kennedy. I didn't think you could. May I apologize for doubting you?"

"You were never so doubtful as I was," Cliff had told him.

Now he sat with Joyce in the peace of the evening, and there was much that he wanted to say but he could find no way to begin.

Out of the shadows her hand came to touch his cheek and rest, cool against the scar.

It was then that he kissed her.

THE END.

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Turk counted out a thousand dollars as Porter watched

The Devil's Checkerboard

Little Joe Dent had crossed half of Texas on the trail of Reece Porter, gentleman, horse thief and cold killer—and the whole borderland of the Indian Territory had reason to know that those two were enemies

By J. E. GRINSTEAD

Author of "Barons of the Border," "The Crimson Trail," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

UP out of the southwest toward the peaceful valley of Rodney's Bend, in the Texas cattle country, rode young Joe Dent, hard on the trail of a murderer and horse thief, Reece Porter. Porter, slightly in the lead, reached the little Bend town of Cedar Springs and, when Jim Rodney, landowner, deputy sheriff and bulwark of peace in the Bend, attempted to stop him, Porter shot him down and sped out of town. Reaching the ferry that spanned the river dividing the valley, Porter again used his gun to kill—this

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time old Benny Gaynor, the ferryman —and escaped into the Indian country.

Thus the Devil began playing again on his checkerboard—Rodney's Bend. Two families, the Rodneys and the Darnalls, own the land of the Bend, renting it to tenants. Old Colonel Darnall, still fiery in spirit, is too old to take the responsibility of maintaining peace. Jim Rodney's only son, Willis, has a crippled foot which his Puritanical mother declares is a visitation of Providence on the son because of the dead father's ruthlessness in dealing with criminals. Although in love with Nettie Darnall, the colonel's granddaughter, Willis feels himself too handicapped, and when he disappears it is taken for granted that he has committed suicide by drowning himself.

Turk Runnels, proprietor of the Open Hand Saloon, decides to make the Bend wide open. He has his minion, Ed Green, appointed deputy sheriff, and sends another hireling, Tate Beeman, to let the countryside know of the new conditions.

Dent is hired by Mrs. Rodney to remain in charge of the Rodney cattle, sharing responsibility with old Steve Bailey, overseer at the Rodney ranch. Dent takes the job, figuring that the location is a good one from which to direct his drive on Reece Porter. Effie Gaynor, daughter of the slain ferryman, is also taken into the Porter household.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GRAPEVINE WORKS.

THAT night in the overseer's cabin, old Steve Bailey worked laboriously with a short pencil, held in his horny hand. He was making a map of the Box R range for Dent. When it was finished he laid it on the table.

"Now, here you are," he said. "The point of the Bend is north. Here's the Rodney place on the east side. Here's Cedar Springs, and the Darnall plantation. There's the ferryman's cabin and Weed's store. The line represents the bluff across the Bend, and south of that is the wide-open out of doors, where the cattle range. Jim Rodney brought the weak ones in and put 'em on the stalk fields. I'm feeding a few cows that's got young calves. The rest of the cattle are out there on the prairie, and you'll have to find 'em yourself."

"All right, I can understand that," said Dent. "As soon as there is a little grass, I've got to get all these cattle out of the Bend and onto the prairie range before heel-fly time. If I don't, they'll run into the bogs, and we'll lose a lot of 'em."

"You know your cow stuff," complimented Steve.

"I ought to," laughed Dent. "I was born in a corral and cut my teeth on a rope. Here's something I want to know about. What are those two rows of dots showing just across the river?"

"Fords," replied Steve. "The one due east of Cedar Springs is the Isham Ford. It took its name from old Isham O-ke-um-be, a Chickasaw Indian. He had a farm over there in the bottom and lived there until the border got too rough for even an Indian. He moved back up the country. In the old days, before Jim Rodney cleaned the Bend and made it decent, that was a whisky trail and the old Isham place was a hang-out for thugs. I wouldn't wonder it comes into use again, if Mr. Green don't watch out." Steve didn't smile, but his tone indicated that he

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thought Ed Green would fail to see that trail. "The one on the other side," he went on, "is at the mouth of Copperas. It goes on to Eden."

"Nice name," suggested Dent.

"Yes, but that's all that's nice about it. All the thieves, cutthroats and outlaws that ain't anywhere else are at Eden. In the last twenty years Jim Rodney has taken at least fifty bad men who came across from Eden, thinking they could get by with it. I wonder if Mr. Green will try to beat that record."

"All right. Now what is this, straight north from the ferry?"

"That's Troy, five miles from the river on the Indian side. There's a store there. A post office, two big dance halls, one little church, and a blacksmith shop, but whisky is scarce, and business poor. Thugs graduate from Troy, go to Eden, and from Eden to Hades."

"I see," said Dent. "We are strategically located."

"Yes," grunted Steve. "The Devil laid this section out for a checkerboard. Jim Rodney got rid of some of his men, but he never could get the checks rubbed out. It ain't like most checkers. It don't take twenty-four men for the game. One man can play, if he's a good one, but I never saw this Bend when the Devil didn't have more than that here."

"In other words," interrupted Dent, "we have eighty head of good, fat grain-fed saddle horses here in the trap, horse thieves on three sides of us, and Jim Rodney dead."

Steve looked up quickly, with an odd expression on his weatherbeaten face.

"I hadn't thought of it that way. I ain't used to Jim being dead yet."

"We'll have to get used to it," said Dent, as he pocketed the map and left the cabin.

JOE DENT went on to the big bunk house that stood back of the ranch house. He was praying that the river would stand at flood until some of his men could arrive. Those horses would be a huge temptation to such men as Reece Porter. Joe knew that only the fear of Jim Rodney had kept them out of that Bend. The news of Rodney's death would soon spread by way of the grapevine telegraph. Many thieves had been run out of Texas that winter. They had doubtless congregated across the river and were only awaiting an opportunity to strike back.

Dent's outfit so far consisted of himself and two wrinkled old riders who had been with Rodney for years. They were Bill Stone and Vert Childs. These men had ridden the Bend in silence while the hunt was on for Willis Rodney. If either of them expressed an opinion about the disappearance, Dent didn't hear it. They were almost speechless. When Dent entered the bunk shack, Stone and Childs sat over a little fire, smoking in silence. Dent went to business at once.

"Did Jim Rodney ever have any horses stolen?" he asked.

"Once," replied Bill Stone.

"When?"

"Fifteen year ago. Five fellows from over Isham way stole ten saddle horses away from the remuda, out on Elm Creek, at round-up time."

"Did they get away?"

"A little piece. Jim caught 'em just as they reached the Isham ford. Two of 'em was shot, and the other three hung in an old burr oak tree, just where the trail goes down to the river. They haven't bothered Jim's horses since then."

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"I suppose not," said Dent, "but Jim Rodney is not here now. We have eighty head of good saddle horses out there in the trap, all grain-fed and ready for an early round-up."

"Been thinking of that," grunted Childs.

"Well, we want to keep thinking of it. There are only you two, myself, and Steve on the place who could do anything in a fight, but we've got to hold those horses. As long as the river stays up, we're safe, but we want to watch. Pen the horses every night from now on, and when the river goes down, we'll stand watch at night. We can't work cattle without horses, and they're higher than a cat's back."

Dent went on to his room. He began to see that he had taken on a real job, and that the whole burden of working the cattle and protecting the Rodney plantation was going to fall on him. The Rodney household seemed to have fallen back into its regular routine. When Dent went to his early breakfast next morning, Mrs. Rodney was in the dining room and Effie Gaynor was with her. They ate in silence. Dent noticed that Effie was a pretty girl, not more than seventeen, dark, with black hair and big brown eyes. Just noticed it, and that was all. His mind was on the race between the fallen river and those tanned riders he had ordered from down in the cow country.

Two days passed. Dent and his two punchers moved all the cattle that were strong enough out onto the prairie. The river was falling very slowly and it would be some time before men could ford it, even on horseback, at those broad, shallow fords. Steve's men had got the boat back to the ferry, and had put an intelligent Negro in charge until he could find a suitable ferryman. Sandy would not talk except to Steve or Dent, and he would remember what crossed on his boat.

NOR was Joe Dent the only one who thought of the horses and the river. Turk Runnels said he was boss of the Bend and he meant to make it stick. Turk was not a horse thief, because that was too risky, but he knew as well as anybody that the best way to cripple the Rodney outfit was to set them afoot. He could do it, without danger to himself, and he would do it. So, early on the third morning after the search ended, Turk was holding a private conference with Ed Green and Tate Beeman.

"Now, get this straight," said Turk. "I'm in this thing to win, every way I can. There's just one thing in our way. That's Steve Bailey and that fellow Dent. If you have a chance to get either or both of them, Ed, do it, but don't try it here in town, unless it's inside the saloon, and you've got the right witnesses. You know what I mean by right witnesses, Ed."

Green colored, swallowed hard, as if his neck hurt, but said nothing.

Turk grinned, and went on: "I'm not figuring strong on anybody getting either of them fellows easy. They've got stingers. There's no cowhands at Rodney's. Jim always hired new ones for the round-up. They come here looking for work. I'll send this smart Mr. Dent the ones I want him to have. Meantime, if he gets a little short of horses, that'll help. All we need, to do that, is let it be known on the other side that Jim's dead, Willis has drowned himself, Ed Green is deputy sheriff, and the boys from across the river are welcome to dance and drink at the Open Hand."

"How are they going to find that out?" asked Tate Beeman.

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"Easy enough. Steve Bailey got the boat back yesterday, and put that copper-colored nigger, Sandy, to running it. You can't get across to Eden and you can't cross the other way to the Isham settlement. I want you to go to Troy. Just hibernate around the pool halls and tin-top joints and mention casual about Jim and Willis. If any horse talk comes up, mention some good, grain-fed saddle stock at Rodney's, about the best you ever seen, that ought to be for sale, now Jim's dead. Then mention the new foreman and no hands yet.

"If anybody asks you about Ed, just tell 'em he's friendly to everybody and aims to keep the Bend wide open. Do that, and as soon as the river goes down we'll have plenty of business. Get your horse now and ride. Don't take a bottle of whisky, like a fool. You might run into a marshal. We want to let the other fellows do the drinking. Just make it a visit to some of your friends in Troy. Stay long enough, but not too long."

So it chanced that on that bright, sunny, first day of March, the first man that Sandy set across the river in the patched-up boat was Mr. Tate Beeman. Tate was in a fine, friendly humor. He wore good clothes, rode a good horse, and had an air of prosperity. As Sandy poled the boat upstream before pushing into the current, Tate said:

"How do you like my horse, Sandy?"

"Sho' purty hoss," replied Sandy.

"Ought to be. I paid a hundred and a quarter for him. They've got some good ones at Rodney's, haven't they?"

"Yassir, some of 'em's right good."

"How many they got?"

"I dunno, sir. Mist' Stone and Mist' Childs looks after 'em."

Beeman went on, and asked too many questions about the Rodney horses. If Turk Runnels could have heard him, he would have shot him, for Sandy was what Turk called a "smart nigger."

JUST before sunset, Sandy ferried Beeman back to the Texas side. A little while after dark, Sandy was talking to Steve Bailey in the bottom a few hundred yards below the ferry. An hour later, Steve was talking to Dent in the overseer's quarters.

"Tate Beeman went across to Troy to-day," he said. "Tate hasn't got any sense. He asked Sandy a lot of questions about the Rodney saddle stock. Tate hasn't got the nerve to steal a horse, but he's low enough to take a split for giving information to men that will steal 'em."

"Thank you, Steve," said Dent. "We have the horses penned, and will keep night guard."

"Won't be any danger until the river goes down a little more. They wouldn't try to ferry 'em, but I'll bet a hundred dollars to a nickel that the grapevine has worked into Eden and the Isham settlement by now. They all know that Jim and Willis are dead, and that there's a lot of good horses and only a few men here at Rodney's."

At that same moment Turk Runnels and Beeman were talking in Turk's room.

"Say, Turk, I met that fellow Porter at Troy. He's some man. Politest fellow I ever seen, and wouldn't let nobody pay for a drink of tin-top."

"Where's he hanging out?"

"Down at Isham's. I told him the Bend was wide open now and you'd admire to have him and his friends come to some dances. He was riding that big brown, and say, that's some

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horse. I don't blame that Dent feller for wanting to get him back, but—gee, Turk, that little blue-eyed runt ain't got no chance with a fellow like Porter."

"Maybe not," said Turk, slowly, "but you listen to me. Underrating the enemy ain't the way to win a fight. Another thing: don't talk too much, and don't talk at all on this side of the river, about what you see and hear on the other side. Just let me do the talking, and you do what you're told to do."

Three days passed quietly in Rodney's Bend. There was dancing every night at the Open Hand, but business was none too good. A lot of girls had come in and there was a good showing of gamblers, but not much money was changing hands. They were all waiting for the harvest, when the gang of free-spenders should come across from the other side.

Then things began to happen in flocks. Four men rode into Cedar Springs. Two of them had crossed at Isham's and the other two at the mouth of Copperas. Turk knew all of them and greeted them warmly. They stayed an hour. When they left, Turk gave each of them a road bottle. They said they'd be back that night and bring the gang.

Turk was in high spirits. Business would pick up now. He was boss of Rodney's Bend. Give him just one year, with the old Bend wide open, and he'd clean up. He had a system of spies that kept him advised of everything that happened in the Bend. He even knew all that was going on at the Rodney plantation.

But did he?

How did it happen, then, that he didn't know that two wiry, tanned riders had been stopped that very morning on a bushy draw five miles south of Cedar Springs by Joe Dent? Dent called them by name and looked them over from the pistols at their belts to the stubby carbines in their saddle scabbards. He called them Neal and Hardy. Neal was around six foot, lithe as a panther. Hardy was a small man, whose gray eyes seemed to take in the whole world and everything in it.

"Mighty glad to see you boys," said Dent, "and I have a real job for you. The first thing I want you to do is to hide up in the brush on this hollow. If any of the other boys come up the trail, stop them and all of you stay here until night. Then I'll come and get you."

"Oh, it's like that, is it?" laughed Hardy. "Dangerous to be safe in the daytime. No wonder you need men for this new outfit of yours."

So it happened that all unbeknown to the wise boss of Rodney's Bend, Joe Dent led Neal and Hardy and four more of the same type down the bluff far to the east of Cedar Springs and on to the Rodney place just after nightfall.

THE dance at the Open Hand was fast and furious. There was a big crowd and everything went. A little after midnight, Turk walked up to Ed Green.

"Looks like some of the boys got tired of our party," said Turk. "About a dozen of 'em left."

"Went home, I reck'n," said Green.

"Fine," grinned Turk. "That leaves plenty of girls for the ones that are left. You look tired, Ed; you better go to bed."

Twelve men rode east from Cedar Springs, then turned north into the bottom and stopped. A few minutes

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later a man came to them from the direction of the Rodney plantation.

"She's all set, boys," he said. "That old place is dead to the world. The horses are in the pen. All we got to do is open the gate, let 'em into the trap, and drive the whole bunch across the river. Somebody had a wise idea about this."

They went on, opened a gap in the south end of the little pasture, and rode slowly through the bottom to the gate. One of them dismounted to open the gate.

"Gosh, fellows," he called in a low tone, "this gate's locked. Some of you get down and help me take it apart." Half a dozen others dismounted.

"Yes, it's locked," snapped Joe Dent's voice from inside the pen. "Get your hands up, and do it now."

"Like fun we will," yelled the leader, who was still on his horse. "Let 'em have it, fellows," and he fired the first shot. It was also his last one. The whole side of that pen blazed. The leader and two others pitched from their saddles. Three of those on the ground regained their horses. Three fell where they stood.

Six were left and they rallied to shoot it out. That cavvy of fine horses was hard to give up. They didn't stand long, however. There was a kind of shooting being done from that pen that the border was not accustomed to. At the second volley, the six, three of them hard hit, turned tail and disappeared into the bottom.

Joe Dent only knew that he had won the first skirmish in what promised to be a long-drawn-out war. There were many things about it all that he didn't know. He suspected, but didn't know, that Turk Runnels was the prime mover in an effort to set him afoot. He didn't even suspect that one of those men lying dead outside the gate was Clyde Martin, notorious border outlaw and leader of the Isham settlement gang. Neither did Joe suspect that in this game of checkers, the Devil had sacrificed Martin to make a place for the cold-blooded Reece Porter as leader.

RIDING hard, the three wounded outlaws and two of the others made for the Isham ford. The sixth went storming into Cedar Springs and hunted up Turk Runnels.

"Say, Turk," he warned, "you better pass the word to the boys to get back across the river."

"Across the river?" queried Turk. "Why, what's the idea? The Bend's wide open. Ed Green has gone to bed and shut his eyes. So he can't see anything."

"Maybe so, but I haven't shut mine, and I can see plenty. There's an army at Rodney's, and they're on the prod."

"Army! There's four men there, and three of 'em are so old their bones rattle."

"Maybe that was the noise I heard, but I don't want to argue. I'm in a hurry to get across to the other side. That rattling killed six of our gang and crippled some more. You passed out the word to come on, and you'd keep things open. They ain't open around Rodney's by a damn sight. I'm just coming clean and telling you. You can pass it on to the boys, or leave it alone."

"Of course I'll pass it on, if it's that way, but—"

"It's that way, and I'm going to ride before it gets worse. Before I go, listen to me one minute. Do you know what happens to a man that throws the game on us fellows?"

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"'What do you mean?" demanded Turk.

"I mean that you said Ed Green was asleep. I didn't see him asleep. If we ever find out that Ed was there with them fellows—"

"Why, you're crazy," snarled Turk.

"Maybe I am, but I ain't no fool. This is one game where you can't play both ends against the middle. You are either in, or you're out. You better find some way to satisfy the boys."

The man whirled his horse and galloped east out of town. Turk cursed bitterly under his breath, then turned back into the Open Hand. He knew there was not an army at Rodney's place, but he didn't want to get in bad with the outlaws, so he wouldn't take a chance. The word was passed and inside ten minutes the Open Hand was deserted, Turk assuring them that he would investigate and would advise them as soon as this thing blew over.

Early next morning Turk sat in the little room at the back of the Open Hand, where he received information. Turk had Dud Bunson, a pop-eyed nonentity but a useful spy, on the grill.

"What the devil do you mean by telling me that nobody was at Rodney's except this new foreman, old Steve Bailey, Bill and Vert? You better come clean with me."

"Honest, Turk, I got it that way from one of the Rodney coons just before sundown."

"Oh, you did? Well, the next time you report anything to me, you'd better see that it's straight. Get the devil out of here now, and keep your mouth shut and your eyes open."

The new boss of Rodney's Bend was in a bad way that morning. It looked like the spirit of Jim Rodney still reigned in those bottoms. Turk was beginning to realize the truth of the old story about a certain amount of sleeplessness going with a crown. He had brains enough, but it would require brains in more than one place for him to hold his crown. Then a thought came to him. The outlaw had told him he was either in or out. Very well, he'd go in, but wouldn't make it public. If there were some brains on the other side of the river, he would use them to his own ends. Just then Beeman came in.

"Some mess," snarled Turk. "I don't want you mixed up in it. You've got to at least look square. Get your horse and go to Troy. Stay over there until you see this fellow Porter. When you see him, tell him I want to see him. I've got a proposition to make to him."

"Gosh! Turk must be going all the way," mused Tate, as he gladly went out to get his horse and escape from the Bend for a few days.

Turk sat on in his little room, scowling at the walls and planning to throw the Bend wide open and make money by it—with no danger to himself.

CHAPTER V.

A DEBT OF VENGEANCE.

AS Turk sat planning his conquest of Rodney's Bend, Ed Green walked in, with sleep still in his eyes.

"Oh, you finally came to life, did you?" greeted Turk.

"You said for me to do what I was told to do. You told me to go to bed," growled Green, "and I went."

"Yes, and slept your head off, while hell was being played. Some of the boys from the other side went to Rodney's last night to get some horses. That outfit opened on 'em and killed six."

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Ed Green sat open-mouthed, looking goggle-eyed at Turk. Several times he essayed to speak, but the words would not come. Turk eyed him and finally he snapped:

"What the devil's the matter with you? Didn't you ever see me before?"

"Yes, I—Turk, I want to get something straight."

"What is it?"

"You may shoot me, but I got to know. I understood that you meant to play in with the fellows from the other side, but—do you mean to go all the way?"

"If you mean am I going to actually steal a horse and get a rope around my neck, like a damned fool, no. I owe this Bend a debt, and I'm going to pay it. Also, it owes me, and I'm going to collect. For years old Colonel Darnall has treated me like what he calls a 'po' white' and the Rodneys have treated me like trash beneath their feet.

"I'm going to break 'em both, and I'm going to get rich. Both plantations would starve out and be sold for taxes if it wasn't for the niggers that work 'em. There'll come a time when there won't be a black in this Bend. I could have worked it without much help since Jim Rodney and Willis are dead, if it had not been for this devil, Dent, showing up. It looks like he's going to be a hard pill. I've got to get rid of him and the Box R cattle, and the only way to do that is to put them afoot and keep 'em that way until the rustlers clean up the cattle."

"And where do I stand?"

"Right where I put you. Attend to your official duties, which are: keep busy all the time, see as little as possible, and the first excuse you have, throw this Dent in jail."

"That's all right for you," said Green, "but—"

"It's all right for you, too," snapped Turk. "Unless you want—"

"Hold on, Turk. You're always reminding me that you got a rope on my neck."

"Well, don't make me do it. I—now, what the devil's that?"

"Sounds like the United States Army marching," said Green, as they sat listening to the clumping of boots and jingling of spurs out in the saloon.

"Come on and let's see what it is," said Turk, rising and throwing open the door.

THEY were out in the barroom and the door closed behind them before they understood. The row of men were at the bar taking a drink, and they got a glimpse of Joe Dent's face in the mirror, just before he swung around, facing them. The other six men were total strangers in Cedar Springs.

"Good morning," said Dent. "You are just the men I want to see."

"Well, I guess you see us," snapped Turk.

"Sure. Do you want to take this standing, or do you want to sit down?"

"If you make us tired, we'll sit down." Turk grinned at his joke, but somehow he didn't feel humorous.

"All right. I want to talk to Mr. Green first, and then I'll talk to you. You told me you were deputy sheriff in this Bend."

"You bet yo' damned neck I am," said Green, boldly, "and I want you to remember it."

"I'm remembering it. I understand that one of your official duties is to take charge of dead men found in your precinct. I came in here to tell you that there are six men lying dead in the horse-trap at Rodney's, and I want you to go get 'em."

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"Who killed 'em?"

"I did. They were trying to steal Box R horses, and got killed. My men were with me, but I'm foreman of the Box R outfit. I told the men to fire, and I'd take the responsibility."

"I told you," said Green, "that we didn't see things that way, here in the Bend. You're under arrest." Green dropped his hand to his gun. In the short half of a split second and before his gun started from the holster he was looking into six other guns, and Dent was standing with his arms folded, laughing at him.

"Don't be a fool, Green," said Dent. "Let that gun alone and listen to me. I know what you are. You're a monkey on a string and your legs jerk when Turk Runnels pulls the string. You told me you didn't hunt trouble. You didn't have to hunt this. I brought it to you."

"Yes, and you'll be damned sorry you brought it," choked Green.

"I'm already sorry I had to bring it. I'll tell you some more, for I want a plain understanding with you fellows. I'm foreman of the Box R. I'm going to protect the brand. I'll kill any man I catch with a horse or cow bearing that brand, if he doesn't kill me. That 'll be an even break, and all they ought to ask."

"Yes, an even break like you're giving me," snarled Green, "with a bunch of killers at your back."

"Don't get funny, Green. When you want to meet me alone, send me word. I don't think you're a horse thief. I don't think you've got the nerve to take a chance. If I ever catch you with a Box R horse, I'm not going to shoot you. I'm going to hang you on that old burr oak where Jim Rodney hung some of your kind."

It was a random shot, but it went home. Green's face went red, then ashen, and he staggered back a step.

"I said, if I caught you with the horse," Dent went on. "That's all for you. Go get those dead men before the hogs eat 'em up. Now, Runnels, I want you to listen to this. I'm not going to bother you if the deputy sheriff don't, as long as you confine yourself to running this dive, but you'll have to lay off the Rodney place. I believe you knew all about that attempt to steal Box R horses, and I want you to know just where I stand. If I ever learn, beyond doubt, that you are in on a steal like that, I'm going to hang you on that same burr oak tree."

"Yes, you will," roared Turk, pouring out a volley of oaths. "I'll have the sheriff out here."

"Fine! That's the best joke yet. A Texas sheriff is about the squarest man on earth, and the last thing you want to see. I just came here to tell you fellows, so you wouldn't complain if you got hurt in this game you are playing. Now I've got you told, good-by."

DENT turned and walked out, his men with him. They didn't even look back, but mounted and rode out of town. Turk and Green stood in their tracks for a full minute, and then Turk blew up.

"You're a heck of an officer," he snarled. "Why didn't you kill that damned outlaw?"

"Why didn't you kill him? You had your gun."

"I ain't an officer."

"I am, and I want to be one tomorrow."

"You better get a wagon and go get them dead ones, if you are. But wait a minute. Nobody heard that but us three," and Turk nodded to the bar-

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tender. "Those fellows will never tell it. They're not that kind. We can't afford to tell. So just let it pass. Forget it and remember it, like. There'll be another day. Get a wagon and bring those poor devils in and bury 'em. It was my mistake, and I'll pay the expense."

There showed the first flash of an intelligent criminal in Turk Runnels. He would just pass the insult. He didn't have the power to do otherwise just then, but he was going to get it. This thing had come too suddenly, before he had his machine in working order.

There could be no misunderstanding now. Dent knew something that Turk was not ready for him to learn. It was that Turk, for some reason, was going to make war on the Rodney outfit. The only difference was, Turk had meant to carry on underhand warfare. Now it would be in the open, and, Turk reflected, must inevitably shorten the lives of Joe Dent and Steve Bailey.

There was no dance at the hall that night. There was not a man in town from across the river. A scare had been thrown into the gamblers, and everybody was in hiding. Green's arrival with the six bodies increased the quiet.

Joe Dent had said his say, and he and his men had gone about their business. It was an early spring, and there would soon be plenty of grass to work cattle. There was much to do. Steve's wagon had come in from the railroad, bringing supplies. There were ropes to stretch, hobbles to make, and an endless number of things to be done. Two more men came in that day. Dent was too good a general to think that letting the enemy alone was the best policy, but he could do nothing else.

In the first place, he had only a nebulous idea of who the enemy was. In the next place, Steve Bailey was his counselor and his senior, and that was Steve's policy. "Let 'em alone until they jump you, then give 'em all you're worth."

Dent was sure that many things would happen at Cedar Springs that he ought to know, but he had no means of espionage. So, when night came on, he merely penned the horses and set his watch, then went calmly to bed to await results.

IF Joe Dent had watched the fords on the river that night, he would have seen an interesting thing. About midnight two horsemen crossed at the Isham ford and rode quietly on toward Cedar Springs.

Turk Runnels sat in his little room. He was not sleepy. He had lost two moves in the game he was playing, and it irked him sorely. There were things he wanted to do, but mustn't. He must come out of this thing in the clear. There might be talk, but there must be nothing that legal action could be hung on. Let others take the chance of that. He would furnish the sinews of war and reap the profit. All he needed was a leader with some brains who would take the chances.

Like an answer to his thought, there came a rapping at the door. He thought it must be Tate Beeman, for the saloon was closed, and no one else had a key except the bartender, who had just gone home.

"Come in!" he called.

The door opened, and Turk Runnels got his first close-up look at Reece Porter.

Porter was not a boy. He was perhaps thirty-five. He still retained the figure and all the attractiveness of youth with the added vigor of mature

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manhood and a strong, intelligent face. He was neatly clad, and his manners were perfect. No mortal man would have taken him for a criminal.

"You wanted to see me, Mr. Runnels," he said, after the introduction, when they were seated.

"Yes, I did," replied Turk bluntly. "It's a cold business matter. Correct me if I'm wrong. You are in the Indian country because it ain't safe for you to be anywhere else?"

"Well," smiled Porter, "you saw me kill one man, and I was obliged to kill another before I got across."

Two things held Turk silent for a moment after that. One was the calm manner in which the man spoke of cold murder; the other was that, in spite of the fact that Runnels knew this man was a murderer, and the fact that he meant to connive with him for more murder, he couldn't get away from the feeling that Porter was a gentleman. It gave him that same feeling of littleness that always came to Turk in the presence of Colonel Darnall, and for which Turk heartily hated the colonel. At last Turk took a grip on himself and went on:

"The fact is that I've got a job for you, if you are open to a proposition. It's a job for a man that—well, a man that is at outs with the law."

"I see you hesitate to use the word criminal, as I do," said Porter suavely. "I dislike the word. I very much prefer the expression, 'an enemy to society.' Yes, I am open to a proposition, even call it a job if you wish, provided it is a big enough job. I won't undertake anything little. I hate littleness. I'd kill an enemy, without compunction, but I couldn't do him a little wrong at any price. At school I was a great student. I was a great gambler, and lost a considerable fortune. As a criminal, I would be a great criminal—I should say, a great enemy to society."

"I guess you are right about that," said Turk, "but would you be willing to make war on the sort of people who have been born with a silver spoon in their mouths for so many generations that it don't look no better than a pewter one to 'em?"

"I gather that you mean gentlemen, and perhaps ladies," said Porter, showing his teeth in an odd smile. "I am an enemy of society, and therefore society is my enemy. My creed is that it is no wrong to kill one's enemies, as they would kill him. I make no reservations. All enemies look alike to me."

TURK seemed satisfied. "All right," he said; "here's the job. Jim Rodney, the man you killed in order to get away, was deputy sheriff here. The Rodney family and the Darnall family are the silver-spoon folks I was talking about. They own the Bend, and have always run it. When Rodney was dead, I got a deputy appointed that I can handle. Jim Rodney kept this Bend tight for twenty years, and robbed me out of a chance to make money.

"I'm boss here now. The Bend is wide open. Old Colonel Darnall and his niece and Jim Rodney's widow are all that are left. I aim to break 'em. The man that was chasing you, Joe Dent, has taken the job of range foreman for Mrs. Rodney and has brought in a lot of killers.

"I want Dent and his cow outfit put out of business. I can handle the rest, if Steve Bailey, the Rodney overseer, happens to get killed. Of course, you couldn't undertake the job alone, but you might interest others."

"A very interesting proposition,"

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said Porter, "but there is one thing you have not mentioned. That is the pay."

"Pay? Why, there's eighty head of jam-up good saddle stock at the Rodney—"

"Pardon me," interrupted Porter, "but I have heard of those saddle horses. Since they don't belong to you, I don't suppose you would presume to sell or trade them in pay for my services. I have been told that six men from the other side were killed more or less dead last night, while trying to take them. Incidentally, the death of Clyde Martin made me the head of the —what shall I say?—the Isham chapter of the enemies of society. No, Mr. Runnels. Only money speaks the language that I can understand."

"How much money?"

"Plenty of money It is quite a task you wish performed. My men must eat and must wear clothes. Crime must be profitable, or men won't follow crime. I should say, they will refuse to be enemies of society. I will undertake the destruction of the Box R cow outfit for five thousand dollars."

"Five thousand dollars! Why—"

"We won't quibble, Mr. Runnels," said Porter, holding up his beautifully shaped white hand in a gesture of protest. "I told you I would do nothing in a little way. I came here at your request. And if we cannot agree, then—"

"How would you want that five thousand?"

"A thousand down in cash; a thousand each when Bailey and Dent are killed; and the remaining two thousand when there is no longer a Box R cow outfit."

Turk swung around to his safe, opened the door, and handed Reece Porter a thousand dollars in bills.

"I'd like to pay you the next two thousand by to-morrow night."

"You seem to have some personal grudge against Dent and Bailey," smiled Porter as he pocketed the money.

"Yes, it's personal and private, damn' em," snapped Turk.

"Good!" laughed Porter. "I saw that on a letter one time, and it amused me. I don't know whether we can earn the other two thousand or not, but I'll be here to-morrow night, with some of my men, and if you can arrange to have those gentlemen as guests we'll see what can be done."

When Porter had gone Beeman said in an admiring tone: "Ain't he the smoothest, coldest proposition you ever seen, Turk?"

"Cold as Greenland's icy mountains," growled Turk. "But—you want to remember one thing, Tate. If Porter ever suspects anybody of throwing the double— Phooey—just like that! There's a man who don't care who he kills, nor when he does it."

DURING the interview with Porter no one had paid close attention to the single window in that little room. There was a small piece broken out of the lower corner of one of the lower panes of glass. If they had looked, they couldn't have seen a face, for it was as black as the night. They might have seen eyes and teeth, but that the mouth and eyes were closed, in order to "listen hard" after the first terrified peep.

Pompey, the porter, had missed that two bits that he received each day for telling his polite fiction, since Colonel Darnall no longer patronized the Open Hand. He had been in a crap game that night, and was broke. Wending

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his way disconsolately toward his cabin, he saw a light in Turk's window. Thinking he would look in and, if Turk seemed to be in a good humor, hit him for the two bits to get some breakfast, Pompey took one peep, and dropped out of sight. "That white gem'man that kill' Mist' Jim Rodney" was in there talking to Turk.

Pompey's face didn't show at that window again, but his black ear was as close to that hole as he dared put it, and he got an earful. When Porter left the room, Pompey left the window with but one thought in mind. He wanted two bits to get some breakfast. He skirted the Darnall home, chancing the dogs, and knocked on the door of Sam's cabin.

"Dat you, Miss Nettie?" asked Sam sleepily, as he opened the door.

"No, it ain't you Miss Nettie; it's me, Pompey. Git out'n de way an' let me in, 'fo' I bust you one. Light dat candle right easy."

"What you want, Pompey?" asked Sam, looking at Pompey over the lighted candle.

"Boy, Ah wants two bits."

"Huh. Wantin' ain't gettin'."

"Listen, Sam," wheedled Pompey. "Them old bones treated me scan'lous. I'll give you something for them bits."

"Le's see it."

"You can't see it. It's news."

POMPEY told the wild tale, and in his excitement he talked much louder than he intended, in spite of Sam's caution. He concluded with: "Now, gimme them two bits and lemme go from here befo— Oh, Lawdy!"

A window in the "big house" had rattled, and Colonel Darnall's voice cut the night.

"Sam!"

"Yassir, Marse Cunnel," quavered Sam at the open door.

"What did I tell you about having boys in yo' cabin at night? Who is that out there?"

"It's Pompey, Marse Cunnel."

"You and Pompey come here."

Now, if that order had come from any other person on earth, Pompey would have run, but he would as soon have thought of disobeying the Almighty as Colonel Darnall. So a fat black boy and a skinny brown one sneaked through the back entry and on to the colonel's room. Pompey had forgotten that he wanted a quarter now, and was bent on saving his hide. Before he was fairly inside the room he was blurting out the wild story he had told Sam.

Suddenly Colonel Darnall sat up and swung the Shiloh leg over the edge of the bed. There he sat, his bare shanks shining in the candlelight until Pompey finished, and the colonel did not reach for his cane as Pompey expected. Instead, he said:

"I'm mighty sorry you did that, Pompey. You ain't no account, but I hate to see a boy killed. If Porter ever finds out you spied on him, he's going to nail your hide to a tree and tie your ears on his bridle reins."

"But, but, Marse Cunnel, I—I—"

"Don't try to lie out of it. If I ever hear again of you peeping and listening at windows, I'm going to stripe your black hide. Take this four bits and get out of here. Don't forget to keep your mouth shut about what you heard."

When Pompey was gone, with a scare under his black hide that would keep him quiet about what he had heard until death, the colonel turned to Sam.

"Pompey don't amount to much,

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and it wouldn't hurt much if he was killed; but I need you, Sam. Go saddle the pony and ride over to the Rodney plantation. It 'll be daylight by the time you get there. Tell Mr. Joe Dent I said would he please come over here at once. I want to see him. Tell him just that and no more. If you ever tell what Pompey told you, Porter will nail your hide to a tree. If he don't, I will. Go on now."

CHAPTER VI.

A SPY REPORTS.

A LIGHT had just showed in the window of the overseer's quarters; but Joe Dent, who was also an early riser, was up, and had stepped out the side gate on his way to the bunk shack to rouse his men. Dent heard a pacing horse coming lightly up the trail, and stopped to listen. He had never seen Sam, so when the rider turned out to be a light-brown Negro boy he wondered.

"Good mawnin', suh," greeted Sam in a low tone. "Is you Mist' Joe Dent?"

"Yes. What do you want?"

"I's Cunnel Darnall's boy, Sam. Marse Cunnel say would you please come over to Rose Hill right away. He wanter see you important."

"Tell him I'll come right after breakfast."

Dent went on to the men's quarters. He could think of no reason why the colonel should want to see him, except that some one had found Willis Rodney's body. His first thought was to tell Steve. Then it occurred to him that if Colonel Darnall had wanted to see Steve, he would have sent for Steve. It was beginning to dawn on Dent, too, that he and Steve didn't see things just alike in this mess. So he kept this matter to himself.

Dent's other two men had come in the evening before, so he had his full complement. The outfit would be ready in another day, and they would take the chuck-wagon and go to the prairie, taking the horses out of the bottom and danger. So immediately after breakfast, having set the men to tasks, Joe rode away alone to the Darnall home. The old colonel met him at the door, and they went at once to the library.

"I understand that you have some new hands in the Box R outfit, suh."

"Yes, sir," replied Dent.

"Looks like the bandits have set in to overrun the Bend, having heard Jim Rodney is dead. I've got a log stable that my daddy built to keep Indians from stealing his horses. I lock Saracen in there every night, with a padlock and chain. He's twenty years old, but he's the best horse in Rodney's Bend, and I don't want to lose him."

COLONEL DARNALL was sparring for time. He was studying Joe Dent. The old colonel had led a regiment of wild devils, most of them from Texas, at Shiloh. He knew a horse that would go, and he knew a man that would go, when he saw them. He decided that this lean, wiry, quiet youngster, with his mild blue eyes, would go and go hard.

"I sent for you to talk about the man that killed Jim Rodney, suh."

"Yes, sir," and Dent gave a sigh of relief. So it was not Willis Rodney's body after all, and those women wouldn't be set crazy with grief again. "What was it you wanted to know about Reece Porter, sir?"

"Nothin', suh. I already know it. He was in Cedar Springs last night, and he's coming back here to-night."

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The colonel went on to tell as much as he knew. "Pompey hasn't got much sense. If my boy Sam had heard it, he could have told all that was said.

"I got out of Pompey that Turk Runnels made some sort of trade with Porter and paid him some money. Your name was mentioned and the name of Steve Bailey, and Pompey understood that Porter was to get you two, and was going to try it to-night.

"It's a damned outrage that there is nobody left in this Bend that will blow Porter's head off for killing Jim Rodney, let alone old Benny Gaynor, and his other crimes. I'd try it myself, but I'm too old. I'd only get killed and leave Nettie alone."

The colonel stopped to get his breath and his bearings. He didn't want to say too much, yet he wanted to say enough to get Reece Porter killed.

Dent said nothing, and the colonel went on:

"Mr. Dent, you won't misunderstand me, suh, if I mention private matters. I think you liked Willis Rodney. He was a fine boy, and he never would have done what he did if his father had not been killed. This Reece Porter is responsible for both deaths, and that is not all. No father ever loved a daughter more than I love Nettie.

"Jim Rodney and I had hoped that Willis and Nettie would marry. They have loved each other always, and would have married but for Willis's being so sensitive about that foot. So you can see that this Reece Porter not only murdered the two men, but broke a woman's heart—two hearts, in fact, for there will be nothing more in life for Jenny Rodney, as fine a woman as God ever made."

"I can understand, sir," said Dent. "I'll do what I can."

"I was sure of it. That's why I sent for you instead of Steve Bailey. Steve is as fine a man as ever lived, and he'll keep the dogs off himself and what's in his care, but he's old and he won't go out of his way. Good-by, suh, and I hope to hear that you, or some of your men, have put a bullet through this Reece Porter's brain."

Dent left, without commenting on what the old colonel had told him, but many thoughts were in his mind. He had suspected that Turk Runnels was out to get the Box R outfit and, for some reason, ruin the Rodney plantation. It was clear now that he meant to organize the bandits on the border for that purpose. Dent had come into that country on the trail of a certain brown horse. He seemed to face a bigger task now.

JUST at nightfall that same evening Dud Bunson pushed his pop-eyes in at the door of Turk's little room.

"Well, come in," snapped Turk. "What do you want? Talk fast."

"Why, the Box R cow outfit is ready to roll. They got the chuck-wagon out in the trap, and the cook fixed supper in camp. One of the Rodney coons told me two more men came in yesterday, and that's all the outfit. Ten new men, Bill and Vert, and Dent, the boss. That makes thirteen. It shore are an unlucky number for a cow outfit."

"Yes," growled Turk, "and they'll be damned unlucky."

An hour later Reece Porter was in that little room. He was as suave and courteous as if he were at a party, spending a few minutes with the host in his study. Turk had just told him that the Box R outfit of thirteen men was camped in the little pasture. They must be taken that night, or they would

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get away to the range, and it might be months before the job was finished, for they would be working with other big outfits and would be hard to get at.

"We'll attend to that on our way home from the dance," said Porter. "You know, a thing of that kind is quite simple. The world's greatest generals have won by striking first and killing without stint. The reason that so many organized enemies of society fail in their undertakings is quite plain. There is an inherent dislike for killing in most men. Even enemies of society kill only to avoid capture.

"I have no such feeling, and I am schooling my men to the same policy. I have twenty men with me. When the boys are tired of dancing, we'll simply go there, kill those men, and drive their horses away. If we get Dent or Bailey, or both of them, I shall come back to collect, so please wait up. I must go among my men now and get a little of the fun that's going on."

Porter passed out into the barroom and on up to the dance hall. Turk Runnels would have given much for Reece Porter's nonchalant bearing and lordly manner. Porter cared no more for his men than if they had been so many pawns in a game, but they were a means to an end, and he knew how to handle them.

If he could establish a reputation for generosity and could make one big coup, men would flock to him along that border and he would be a king among them. So he had given his men the entire thousand dollars. Fifty dollars to each. Turk was rapidly getting his thousand back, as the outlaws drank, danced and gambled. Porter went among them and spoke to certain group leaders.

"Let the boys have a good time. Let them drink plenty, but don't let them get drunk. We have some work to do after the dance."

That was all. Porter selected a partner, led her to the floor, and danced with the easy grace of a prince.

AT the foot of the hill below town eleven men stopped in the shadows of the heavy timber. Stone and Childs had been left to watch the horses, supposing that Dent and his youngsters were going to town for one last little fling before work started.

"Now, boys," said Dent, "we don't want to take any chances. None of you wants to get killed, and I don't want to lose any men. Those fellows are on the kill. They'll outnumber us, and we don't want to get cornered. The first thing I want is Dave Stalman's brown thoroughbred that Porter stole. After that, we'll get what we can. Let's go."

The Open Hand was flaming with lights. Fiddles were screeching, and through the open windows came the hum of revelry, shot from time to time with shrill bursts of laughter. Reece Porter and his men were having a good time. The respectable element of Cedar Springs had shut its doors and lowered its windows. Some of the older citizens could remember the wild days before Jim Rodney cleaned the Bend, and this was like the nights of those days.

Turk Runnels was standing in the door of his little room, looking with greedy eyes at the men who were pouring his own money back into his coffers. He was on the road to riches now, if Porter only did his part, and he would, no doubt of that. Suddenly, at the crash of a shot, the fiddle broke off in the midst of a high, screaming note, and there was a moment's tense, death-fraught silence.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

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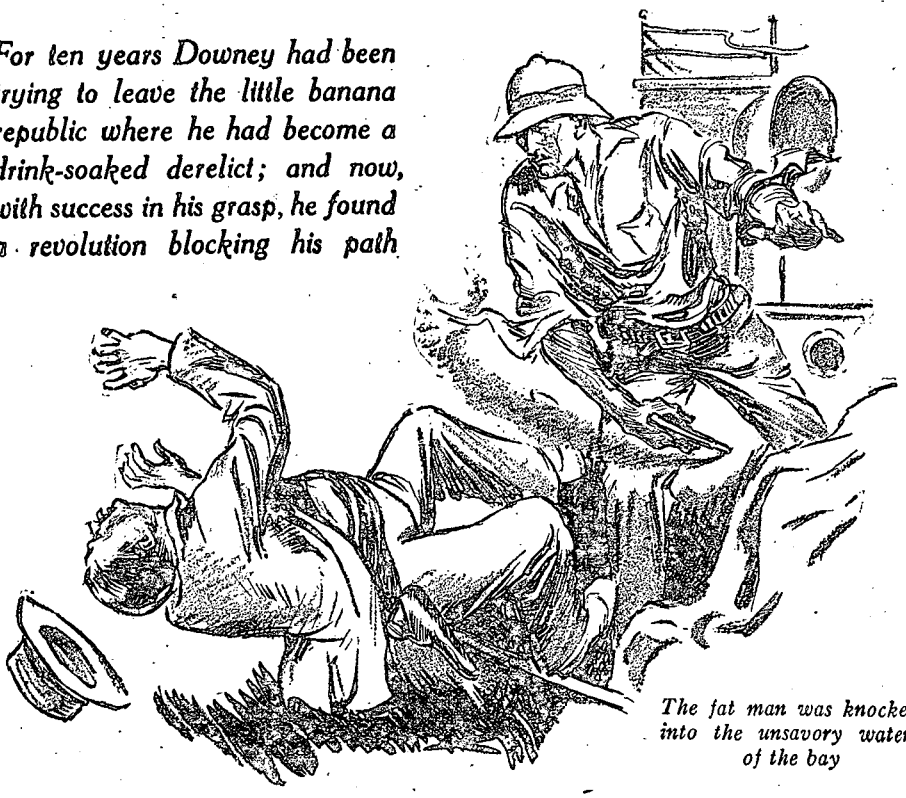
Beach Comber

For ten years Downey had been trying to leave the little banana republic where he had become a drink-soaked derelict; and now, with success in his grasp, he found a revolution blocking his path



The fat man was knocked into the unsavory waters of the bay

By ROBERT CARSE

FROM the warm depths of the doze that had settled upon him, Downey suddenly awoke. He staggered to his feet from the shadow of the rusty deck house where he had been sleeping and stared ashore, down the long, bare lines of the dock, and at the town.

Sun burned in fierce whiteness upon the harbor and town of Santa Rosa. Nothing, as far as he could see, stirred there in the town or upon the beach but a few fiddler crabs, a low-circling cormorant, and a lank, gaunt dog who sought unsuccessfully for scraps at the end of the dock.

But there was firing in the town; he could hear it plainly now. It was that which had awakened him. Downey grunted, and blinked his red-rimmed and sore eyes. Beyond the dirty, yellowish white huddle of the red-roofed town, beyond the fringe of palms by the bull ring, wound up the road that led across the mountains and to Majoricas, the capital.

It was from there that the first brisk murmur of shots had come, to be raggedly answered from the town. There was just one answer to it; he husked that aloud: "Revolution... They use it like I use liquor. Well, let 'em go to it. They won't even get me off this old hooker; it's mine, and it's American property. They won't even get me on that dock..."

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He looked around him as he spoke, at the old and fearfully battered ship on the main deck of which he stood. It really was his—if that meant anything. Not that it did, except as some three thousand odd tons of steel and practically useless machinery which, once, to him, had represented his last wild yet great dream.

In her, four years before, he had placed the last of his money from the States, taken her off the mud flats of the harbor here, reconditioned her so she would at least run. His plan had been to go north, along the coast, to little Bahia Boras, and there load aboard the mahogany the Indians floated down from the jungle, bring it to Santa Rosa, transship it to the deep-water vessels, and thus save months and the expense of the slow haul along the little, narrow-gauge coastal railway. Queerly enough, the plan had worked, as most of his other plans had at the beginning. But then, with five thousand *pesos* clear profit in his pocket, the flesh-pots of Santa Rosa had beckoned, and he had gone — once again.

His crew had broken up and dispersed after that. His captain, a mad Scot, but an excellent navigator, had drifted on south, to Venezuela and the oil fields, seeking a more reliable and sober employer. And he, Downey, had stayed on here in Santa Rosa, until they had rolled him out from the lowest *tequila* shop in the town, mouthing and shaking with the first stages of delirium tremens, and ordered him to be gone, now that his *pesos* were gone.

HE had gone back into the mountains toward Majoricas. One Englishman, a planter, Masters, whom he had known in his earlier days in Santa Rosa, when he had been the consul in the place, had taken pity on him. The Englishman had tried to straighten him out; had fed him, clothed him, brought back a little of his self respect, given him a job as overseer watching the East Indian hands on the *finca*, the plantation. With all this, the Englishman had given him excellent advice—to get north, out of the tropics, out of Santa Rosa, back into his own climate, his own natural surroundings, with his own people.

It was not the first time he had listened to this advice, or thought of it. And, at the end of a year, his wages in the pocket of a fresh suit of whites, he had gone down the trail to Santa Rosa to try it, as he already had a dozen times before.

He had timed his arrival from the hills exactly; according to his schedule, he would only be in the town for six hours, until the arrival of the monthly fruit company steamer from down-coast. But, the steamer had been three days late that trip, and through the jalousies of his windows he had been able to hear the voices of men gathered jovially in the hotel bar below, and the burble of liquor being poured into glasses.

Downey cursed aloud now, thinking of that. He had spent ten years of his life on this coast and in this town, most of them trying to get away. Now, just once more, he was making the attempt. It was his last trial. He knew that if he did not go to-morrow, when the steamer put in from below, he would never go.

It had taken him nine months this time to rake up his passage money. He had worked for the widow and young sons of the English planter in the hills above; that benefactor had been killed, his neck broken, when his horse had shied violently on a jungle trail, bitten

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above the hock by a viper. It was the man's widow who had advised him how to go about his plan of escape and regeneration. It was she who had recently sent a sight draft covering his passage down to the fruit company's agent in Santa Rosa; sent the rest of his wages on to New York for him, awaiting his arrival.

Then he had come down-trail himself, with nothing but the clean, worn ducks he stood in, and the huge Mauser automatic which had once belonged to a Prussian Guard *unter-offizier,* and had been taken from that man in France by the English planter, then a major in charge of a Sikh battalion.

Downey's right hand dropped down onto the square and heavy butt of the huge gun now. He had carried it and used it all during his long second stay at that *finca* in the hills. He had made himself proficient in the use of it, and an excellent shot. When the wild, burning desire for liquor had been upon him, he had gone out beyond the low, whitewashed houses of the Sikh field hands, and practiced on the edge of the jungle with it.

Among those East Indian plantation workers were more than a few big, strapping men who had served with their dead master during the Great War in France. Several of them were excellent shots with the rifle or the pistol. But he had become better than all of them, and for the first time in ten years, gained the real respect and admiration of any men.

SWIFTLY, his loose grip about the butt tightened. He stared shoreward down the long iron dock, across the strip of beach and toward the town. For a time, that firing had died out. Now it had begun again, fiercely, wildly. Little, swift-moving brown blobs which were running men were among the palms on the edge of town. Those were Nationalist soldiers, President Regarios's men, of the battalion garrisoned in the town. And they were leaving the town now—breaking for the hills.

Almost unconsciously, Downey dipped the fingers of his left hand into a pocket of his torn blue denim shirt, seeking a cigarette. Then he remembered that he had none, nothing but that little pile of green fruit there in the shadow of the deck house, this big gun in his belt, and fifty rounds of ammunition for it. But he laughed aloud, looking toward the town and those running men.

"A year ago," he muttered aloud, "or even a couple of months ago, I would have been in the middle of that, one way or another, full of rum and the devil, yelling '*Libertad!*' and packing a rusty old rifle for the next man who would buy me a drink. Not now. Let 'em go—and let 'em love it! This baby stays here, right here, until that New York bound hooker puts in here in the morning. Then I'll swim to her, or jump to her, or go on my hands and knees. But one thing is damn' certain, I don't set my feet down in that rotten hole again!"

His voice halted on a sharp note. The nervous tautness which had held his body for a moment at the first sounds of that firing returned. The khaki-clad government soldiers were no longer in sight. They had disappeared into the jungle fringing the town, and toward the trail that led up into the mountains. That was where the main force of Regarios, the president, probably lay, marching down now to snuff out this new revolution in Santa Rosa.

But, coming toward the beach from

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the town proper, a straggling column of men had broken into view. They were barefooted and barelegged, almost all of them. They wore the wide, rough straw hats of peons, cheap cotton trousers and *rebozos*. But every man had a rifle, besides his inevitable *machete*, and some few of them wore boots, rifle bandoliers and pistol belts.

Almost calmly, Downey watched them come. The men who led them tried to create some sort of military order. That was impossible. They came across the beach and onto the dock, a wild, drunken, disorderly mob. But, he told himself, fingering the Luger thoughtfully, it was a well armed and dangerous mob.

They reeked of sweat, stale *tequila* and freshly burned black powder. As they came on, some of the peons in the main body, loutish scum who had caroused with him in his beach combing days, yelled at him, and waved their hands and rifles. He did not yell back. He did not move. He stood rigidly there by the rail of his only possession, looking at them from under the small forward-thrust shadow of the sun helmet, his right hand holding the Luger tight. He believed he understood what they wanted now—this ship he stood on, which was his, however useless or involved in debt.

HE was right. A fat, strutting man, one Gracianas, a loud-mouthed, incendiary lawyer in the town, was bawling up at him in orotund Spanish. He listened to it all without changing expression. Then he answered:

"This vessel is mine. It belongs to me, an American citizen. It might be under local registry; it might be covered by ninety thousand *pesos* in claims. Your provisional government might have a great need for it as a starter for your 'Navy of Defense.' But, it's mine, and has never been proved otherwise in a court of law. No! Stay ashore! I warn you, Gracianas, you and your monkeys, stay off. I'll pump the first man—"

His harsh and sharp flow of Spanish broke off. The big Luger was out and up. The almost patronizing smile left the fat lawyer's face. His small eyes burned with a dark, dangerous fire. Swathed about his wide stomach, he wore a red silk sash, immemorial sign of revolution. From it, as he had come from the town, he had swung a big Smith & Wesson revolver taken from a Nationalist lieutenant his rabble had slain in an alley. His right hand lifted, then dropped for the butt of that gun as he stepped toward the ship's rail.

Downey came slowly back on the beautifully balanced trigger of the Luger. His slug just grazed Gracianas's shoulder, as he had intended that it should. But the force of that knocked the fat man abruptly over and backward, from the dock and into the unsavory waters of the bay, taking the half dozen men closest to him along also.

"And now?" asked Downey in Spanish, leaning slightly forward.

But one of the drunken peons in the center of the rabble blindly jerked up the muzzle of his old Martini-Henry and fired. The bullet snicked the steel mast-stay beside Downey, hirpeled off into the calm waters of the bay. That was all the rout needed, or wanted. Yelling and shooting wildly, they started forward toward the low side of the little steamer.

Downey got down behind the rust-red barrel and housing of a deck winch, and calmly shot them as they came. But, even as he did so, he knew

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that in time his ammunition would run out, and then they would have him. They swarmed aloft and aboard over the old warps coming in through her stern chocks. He turned and hammered them away from there. They scrambled monkey-wise up the bow hawsers and the anchor chain on the inboard side, and pounded aft on bare feet, to snipe him around the corners of the deck houses.

He grunted a bit as he slid his last clip into the Luger. Here, it seemed, was the end of the ladder for him. Ten years ago, young, confident, healthy, prosperous, he had come for the first time to the tropics and to this town as his country's consul. Now, broken, trapped, hopeless, he was to be killed here within sight of that town which had swallowed up all his hopes and youth, scant yards from the beach where he had scavenged for scraps with the cormorants and town dogs.

Four of them, mad with *tequila* and the unreasoning animal rage of the mixed-blood Indian, came around a corner of the port alleyway at him, *machete* blades bright in their hands.

The Luger was empty. He reversed it, taking the hot barrel into his hand. The man at his feet still held his wide-bladed *machete*. He wrested it from the lax hand and straightened up, ready. But no more screaming, mad-eyed men came at him. An odd sort of inaction and silence seemed to have settled upon this place.

THEN, although he had heard no sound, he wheeled suddenly around, and stared overside, toward the outboard gunwale. He had not expected attack from there: believed it would all come from the dockside, where access to the vessel could be gained far more easily.

But there now, elbows akimbo on the gunwale, one brown-faced man was looking quietly at him. At that man's shoulder was a Thompson sub-machine gun, of a type just purchased a few weeks before by the Nationalist army. The small, black muzzle was trained full on Downey. The hands on the forward pistol grip and the trigger were very steady.

"All right, Downey."

To Downey's surprise, the man with the Thompson gun smiled.

"All right, Morelos; you win."

From his relaxed fingers the Luger, then the *machete*, slid to the canvas of the hatch behind him. He raised his hands shoulder high, kept them there. The man he had called Morelos nodded and put the Thompson gun in the scupperway in front of him. With quick grace and surprising speed he hauled himself aboard, vaulted the cracked rail, swept up his gun again into the crook of his arm. He spoke down then, to men below him, and Downey realized that the other had done the shrewd and logical thing, approached the vessel in a boat.

A respectful "*Si, señor,*" came from below, and there was the scrape of a wooden cutwater along steel sideplates, the whimper of oars in rowlocks. Morelos was coming toward him across the deck. The outflung body of the dead peon between them, he stopped and looked at Downey.

With the new calmness that had come upon him since this had begun, Downey looked back. The man before him was young, hard, keen-eyed. He wore a white drill tropical jacket and sun helmet, light whipcord breeches and riding boots. But beneath the cartridge belt about his waist was the red silk sash which proclaimed him a revolutionist.

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"What's it all about, Morelos?" he asked abruptly.

"Well, you know me, and the butcher who calls himself the President of this country. It's time he went, and more than time. We're just seeing that he does."

"When did you get back from Havana?"

"Two days ago. Gracianas and the others did all the ground work for me."

"Following in your father's footsteps, huh?"

"Not quite. They shot my father, after he'd been their only honest president for half a dozen years. But, let's get to it, quickly. We want this vessel, Downey. In fact, we've got it."

Downey's lips came back from his teeth slightly.

"So I see."

Morelos looked up at him, sharply, thoughtfully, and the expression of his grave, clear-cut face changed.

"I didn't know you were so good with a pistol, Downey."

"You didn't know I was good with anything, did you? I ran out of shells; that's why you're here."

Morelos smiled at that, but his eyes were still grave.

"What are you doing here?"

"Maybe you've forgotten I own this hulk, or at least the title to it."

"No, I hadn't forgotten that. But, what are you doing aboard—now?"

"Waiting for the fruit steamer to come in to-morrow."

"But why in the name of a name wait here, instead of ashore?"

DOWNEY looked toward the old and dirty mass of the town as he replied:

"I fear that place more than I fear any man alive. I guess you know why—or at least you've heard part of my history."

Morelos made an openly impatient and angry gesture with his free hand:

"Listen, *hombre,* I'm busy. I've started a lot of trouble ashore that I've got to finish up. We've taken this town, for the time being, and a couple of other towns up and down the coast. But, Regarios has heard about it now up in Majoricas, and he's probably bringing his whole crack force down in here, to-night.

"I'm the head of the new provisional government, and I'll be nothing but a very dead young man by to-morrow night unless Regarios and his roughnecks are driven back and beaten. You've killed some dozen of the army I lead. My most natural inclination right now is to run a little Thompson lead through you. But, you are an American citizen still, I suppose, despite all you've done, and not done. We want your ship here, we've got to have it, to run more Thompsons, rifles and ammunition in from up the coast."

"Take the damn' thing!"

An odd, dark flush of color came up underneath the sun tan in Downey's haggard face. He strode a pace nearer the other man.

"But, let me go with it. That's all I ask. All I want. Just get me back here in time for the steamer to-morrow. The one going to New York—to my country. You know what's happened to me here, in Santa Rosa. I've spent ten years of my life trying to get out of the place—and I'm still here. If I stay twenty-four more hours in the place, or near it, I'll—I'll—"

With a gesture that was purely Latin and wholly instinctive, Morelos stepped forward and placed his left hand strongly on the American's shoulder.

"I understand, *hombre.* I've seen

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men of your type, hundreds of them just like you before, here or in Havana, all over the tropics. But, listen a moment to me. Regarios, this murderous, grafting swine who calls himself President, is still powerful, still dangerous. This revolution I've started is a gamble. Its success is—well, the best word is 'vague.'

"There'll be a battle to-night, for this town, and for this country. If Regarios wins here, it's all his again. If I win, it's all mine. But, if he wins, don't think you'll get away from this place. Not for a long time, if at all. He'll hold the fruit steamer when it comes in; he's delayed her down the coast right now. And when she gets in here, she'll stay, until the fruit company signs a new concession. Regarios has to get paid for everything he does, and for anything any one else does. You'll rot here in Santa Rosa, Downey, and you'll never—"

"Shut up!"

There was a note of hysteria in Downey's voice. His eyes were wide, staring. His lips were drawn back. At his sides, his calloused hands shook and twitched.

"LISTEN, Downey," insisted the other man very quietly, "listen to me. I know all about you; I have for years. You were a soldier once, an officer in the American Army in France. You know fighting, you know concerted warfare at first hand. I don't, although I've studied it, and dreamed and planned this job here for years. You can help me greatly now, and help yourself."

"How? Where?"

"You remember Masters, the Englishman, who owned the *finca* up in the hills? The man you used to work for. His widow still runs the place; you know that, you just came from there. Well, as you also know, there are perhaps a hundred East Indians up there, men Masters brought in from his brother's plantations in British Guiana. Some of those men were in the Great War, fought personally under Masters. I've found that out. And I've found out, too, that those are the only men from coast to coast in this country, with the exception of myself, perhaps, who respect you, and would follow you or who would obey your orders."

"You mean—"

"This. To-night, right now, you go up into those hills. You go to the Masters *finca,* and talk with Mrs. Masters and the East Indians. She knows of me, and that I am honest, and that my father was honest before me. She knows Regarios, and the reign of worse terror and extortion that would follow, if this revolution is a failure. I want you to bring back from there every able-bodied Sikh that can pack a rifle. I want you to lead them, and with them, fall upon Regarios from the rear or flank when he attacks me and my 'children' here in Santa Rosa."

Morelos paused. His dark, keen eyes held the other man. He went on:

"Either it's that, for you, or a bullet through the head, or a cell in Santa Rosa jail, until Regarios gets in. And if you do—"

Sweat was salt on Downey's lips, stinging in his eyes, rolling in hot, big drops from his chin and fingers.

"If you do help me, then the fruit ship sails to-morrow night, on schedule, and you sail with it—out of here, for New York."

"New York." Downey repeated the name after Morelos as if about it were some connotation the other man could

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not even grasp. "You promise that, Morelos?"

"I promise, *hombre*."

"Good." His voice was hardly audible. "Very good, indeed."

He shied then, nervously. Morelos had made a sudden downward movement past him. When the revolutionary leader straightened up he had in his hand the big Luger automatic. Silently he reversed it, thrust it into Downey's hand.

"Here," he said, "here, soldier. I've got ammunition ashore that will fit it."

"Yes." Downey nodded vaguely, placing the thing with groping fingers inside his leather belt. His eyes were on the town; their glance was like that of a man awakening from a long and terrible nightmare.

HOURS before, the sun had gone. A vast and bright moon was up now, paling the stars, setting its silver fire upon the sea. Even where he and the old *Indio* muleteer sweated high on the mountain slope above Santa Rosa, some of that light broke through the jungle tangle and came to them. Behind them lurched two little pack mules, groaning with the weight of fifty new Mauser rifles, a hundred rounds of ammunition for each gun, all destined for the hands of those Sikh ex-soldiers at the Masters *finca* beyond.

Downey strode ahead. Small branches and the ends of lianas had whipped across his face in this jungle passage and drawn blood that was dry and caked there now. His breathing came hoarsely, brokenly. He staggered a little as he walked, lashing out with his *machete* at the obstructions in the old, overgrown trail they followed. Mosquitoes, gnats and nameless bugs from the jungle vegetation were all over his body, stinging with a slow and steady fire.

But he could go on all night this way. He knew he could. A strange strength, a strange power, was in him now. A man had trusted him—a man had given him confidence, and command.

The old Indian behind him was one of the men who had been there in that mob on the dock during the afternoon. He had seen what he, Downey, had done against them single-handed with that huge Luger. The *Indio* followed him now, implicitly, and called him *"El Señor Comandante"* when he spoke.

The trail they followed struck on an oblique up from Santa Rosa, angling away from the main trail that led from the port to Majoricas. Indians coming down from the mountains to trade in the town had used it years before, when the main trail was not yet built. Now it was all but forgotten. No man had traveled it in years. By it, though, they would eventually intersect the branch leading to the Masters *finca* from the main trail.

They came out onto a short but wide ledge of rock, lying like a sort of promontory in this sea of jungle. No vegetation grew here, and they could stare down and back, at the sea and at Santa Rosa. The old town was lightless except for a small, incessant fretwork of flame on this, the inland side. A mutter of words came from the old *Indio:* Regarios was attacking; his first regiments had come down from Majoricas and were already in action against the untrained rabble of the revolutionists.

The *Indio's* glance swung; he gazed for a moment at the tarpaulin-covered rifles on the two pack mules.

Downey, watching, read that gaze.

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Morelos had trusted him with almost all the new, and good, rifles in the possession of the revolutionary forces. If Downey failed, if the Sikhs did not come, armed with these guns, Morelos's daring gamble would speedily end in a terrible and complete defeat. Downey had seen that kind of thing before—eyeless heads on the gate posts of the town, men with their hands and feet cut off, mutilated wrecks for life. Morelos had been right in what he had said about Regarios, the President: the man was a butcher, among many other things.

Beside him, the old *Indio* spoke: "That will not last long, *señor.*"

"No, about four hours."

"No longer, *señor.* The men of the regular army are well paid and have been promised fresh loot from the town if they win. It will be—"

"March, you! *Pronto!*"

THEY marched, quickening their pace. It was about three hours before dawn when they came to the outer cuttings of the Masters *finca.* Downey still went ahead, the *Indio* nervously leading the noisy mules after him. They came to the first of the coffee-drying sheds. There Downey abruptly stopped. A big, bearded Sikh in breech-clout and turban, a Winchester carbine in his hands, had stepped with silence and speed from the shadows of the shed.

"It is I, Sahib Downey," he said softly and calmly in the language he had learned while working with these men. "You know me, Naik Gahatmala? I seek the *memsahib,* and in a hurry."

"So, *sahib,* I recognize you now. But this man, behind you?"

"My companion. And on the mules, guns. There is war, Gahatmala, as you probably know. To-night I, and probably you, will go to battle."

The big Sikh, who had been a *naik,* a corporal, in his dead master's battalion in the British Expeditionary Force, showed a white flash of teeth above the darkness of his beard.

"Come, then, *sahib,*" he grunted. "It is a long time since I have seen war."

They went on, a silent little column, toward the low and white main house of the *finca.* And from the shadows about the lime and lemon trees flanking the roadway other big, bearded men came forward to see them pass, their terrible crooked-bladed knives in their hands, small smiles of recognition on their dark faces for Downey.

He did not stay long at that place. The widow who owned these hundreds of acres of coffee and fruit land was intelligent, quick in her perceptions, fully able to come to a conclusion rapidly and correctly. She knew Downey, had liked and now trusted the man, seeing something new and startling and strong in his face.

She offered him the use of all the able-bodied men on her plantation; she offered him the use of her three sons, the oldest seventeen and just back from school in England on his long vacation. Downey laughed quietly at that last offer, accepted the Sikhs, and met her hand with his hand.

"You need the boys here," he told her. "I'm leaving three Mausers and a hundred rounds for them. And now—"

The pale, small woman before him understood what was in his face. She also understood what he could not now say.

"Go," she said. "I remember the promise you made, never to come back to this place again. Maybe you've

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broken that, but your returning was far different than it was last time." She smiled at him as he had never seen her smile at any man before except her husband. "Go on and drive Regarios and his cutthroat *soldados* into the sea."

Words were completely beyond Downey then; he just bowed over her hand, nodded to the excited, grinning sons, waved a signal to the big *naik*, Gahatmala, at the door, and was gone.

Their way took them out along the branch trail which had its end in the main road from Santa Rosa to Majoricas. For a brief time, beyond the coffee-drying sheds, Downey had stopped and talked with the big *naik*, the forty-odd other Sikhs and the old *Indio* behind them.

GAHATMALA was in favor of an immediate attack. Some of the plantation hands, veterans of the war in France, clever scouts, had ventured down as far as the main trail during the early hours of the evening. They had seen two regiments, one of cavalry, one of infantry, pass by, bound for Santa Rosa. Those were the outfits which were probably besieging the town now. And, from what those scouts had overheard, lying quietly in the underbrush along the trail, another regiment, composed of infantry and three mountain-gun batteries, was due just about now.

The mountain batteries would finish the thing, if the infantry and cavalry could not. They would hammer the old town to pieces from the slope above, wreck the walls and the shaky morale of Morelos's men, and open the way for the infantry and cavalry.

"You're right, Gahatmala," Downey spoke swiftly, nursing the butt of his Luger. "We must catch that outfit on the trail, and get away with it, then crack down on the other outfits still on the trail. We'll be above them—and be wholly unexpected. Single out four men there who look to you like good corporals. Bring them here."

As if he were again wearing his regimental khaki and noncom's stripes, the big Sikh came to the rifle salute, wheeled and strode off. The quartette he brought back were men all known personally to Downey. With them and the *naik* he spoke tensely.

"That is all. Now, march!"

Perhaps three hundred yards before they came to the intersection of the trail, excited monkeys, parrakeets and night birds warned them by their chatter that many other men and horses were coming along the main path. Downey and the *naik* went ahead, leaving the small body behind them. The big path was still in darkness, but across the wide plateau, toward Majoricas, they could hear the creak of harness leather, of pack straps and rifle slings, the unmistakable noises of thousands of marching men. The Sikh prowlers had been right: another regiment was coming.

Downey sent the *naik* back. When he returned, the column of silently eager Sikh warriors was at his heels. Downey divided them into two segments; one he took, giving the other to Gahatmala. The *naik's* detachment he sent off, across the trail, with orders to go along it as far as they could toward the advancing column. Then they were to halt and wait in cover, until firing started from ahead, here.

The Sikhs were members of one of the most warlike tribes in the world. There was no need to repeat that order twice, or to explain. This was warfare understandable to any fighting man. They were gone off into the

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blackness of the trail at once, running lightly on bare feet over the roots and rocks.

About him in the underbrush, behind tree trunks and rocks, Downey deployed his own men. He slid the big Luger into his hand, pulled off the safety catch, felt in the darkness to see that it was ready for firing. Beside him, thrust through a tangle of lianas, was a new and loaded Mauser. But his weapon, after all, was the automatic, he told himself, a grim smile on his face.

That regimental column was near by now. Already its point and leading companies had passed the *naik's* position, and a score of troopers, carbines across their saddle-bows, were carelessly pushing their little ponies up the trail toward where he and his score of Sikhs lay. He let them pass. He let the first full troop of cavalry pass, then a company of infantry, and a mountain battery. Another infantry company was abreast of him now, marching in loose and shambling ranks of fours, their mounted officers sleepily cursing at them from the saddles.

He drew in one great breath, then expelled it.

"Now!" he cried hoarsely in the Sikh mountain dialect.

AS if fired in target practice on a regimental range, the Mausers roared together in one flat thunder. It was slaughter. But Downey did not think of it at the time; he had no space in which to think of anything. He was firing with his Mauser as fast as he could pull bolt and trigger. Men and horses were writhing, kicking, screaming and dying in the trail. Some few of them fired back, wildly and blindly. Down the trail, echoing on the blast of his own fire, had come the smash of the *naik's* detachment breaking loose with its own galling Mauser fire.

Those abreast of them who still lived ran ahead, or back. They who ran forward bumped into and were checked by the leading companies who had been allowed to go on, and were now turning back at their officers' commands. Those who had run toward the rear were sucked into the insane whirlpool of men escaping from the *naik's* enfilading fire. This was no battle; it was a rout, a slaughter in the darkness.

Swiftly, as he had learned in France, Downey moved his men in the underbrush, so that their position would not be given away. The men were firing individually now, at will, round after terrible round. Awful yells and broken commands came from down the trail; Gahatmala, the *naik*, and his men had gone in, hand-to-hand, with their terrible knives.

It was more than his own men could stand. They tore the long and cruel *kukris* from their belts and plunged out into the trail. Downey let them go. He went with them, a *machete* in one hand, the Luger hammering death in the other.

But that mass of men they struck into was no longer a regiment, and never again would be. It was a hopeless, leaderless mob, eager for one thing alone—escape from death. Some thousand of them Downey and the *nāik* finally let go, streaming bare-handed and almost insane with fear back along the trail toward Majoricas.

Behind, they left their full fighting equipment, a dozen unwounded pack mules carrying the little, powerful mountain guns, and over three hundred dead and wounded. With those Downey did not bother. He had

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the Sikhs hurl the rifles off into the brush, ripping clear the all-important breech bolts first. He had them collect the mountain guns and herd the beasts together while he rapidly examined the pieces and the shells for them, held in straw panniers on the mules' backs.

"Good," he grunted. "We can use these. They're a French type; I received instruction in them in France. Now, we go! This was only a beginner!"

Where the trail swung steeply down in its last winding descent to Santa Rosa and the sea, they stopped. It was the hour of dawn. Already light was coming on the sea. Vaguely, through the coastal mists below, they could see thousands of men on the last turnings of the trail, they could hear the hammer of firing before and in Santa Rosa. As they stood there, bugle calls sounding the charge came dimly up to them, and the first rays of the sun broke clear, striking through the mists.

GAHATMALA and the other Sikhs needed no orders. They were warriors and understood battle. With swift hands they helped Downey assemble one of the little mountain guns. The ranging of the gun was simple. With three experimental shells he found his targets. Then he kept them, the Sikh corporal feeding shells to him, the others streaking down the trail to potshot the amazed Nationalist infantry and cavalry halted there.

At last Downey looked up from the black stub barrel of the mountain gun. "There," he muttered, staring down at the yellow geysers of explosive fumes drifting up from the piles of dead in Nationalist khaki that huddled before the walls of the town. "That's got that. Now, let's go. A battalion or two got into the town, I think. Wait a minute—give me another brace of shells, *naik*."

He fired them down into the impotent huddle of men caught on the last turnings of the trail. It was enough. Those men scrambled, yelling, for the plain before Santa Rosa, broke along it, running for anywhere but that place—anywhere that would afford them real safety from that stalking death above.

Downey led his quietly grinning Sikhs in through the old *Puerta del Sul*. No one stopped them; only hunched knots of Nationalist dead blocked the way. It seemed, he told himself, running a pace or so ahead of Gahatmala, that Morelos had done himself proud with his little Thompson sub machine-guns.

Turning a sharp corner in the winding way, they came with abrupt swiftness out into the *Plaza Mayor*. On one side was the old, square, white city hall, on the other, the old, square, white cathedral. Nationalist dead and hundreds wearing the straw hats and red sashes of the peon revolutionarists strewed the streets leading into the plaza. But in the place itself, some two or three hundred ragged peons were flat on their stomachs behind piles of dead, throwing ragged volleys up into the barred windows of the city hall. The high, dry whine of a sub machine gun came from the bell cupola of the old cathedral.

Swiftly, Downey understood Morelos had attempted to make his final defense from the stout city hall. The first attacking waves of the Nationalists entering the town had trapped him there. Somehow, he had escaped. Now, in the strange ebb and turn of the battle, the Nationalists were making their last stand from the same

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place. Morelos and his men, from the plaza and the cathedral, were concentrating their fire on it.

The whine of the Thompson gun stopped. Downey looked up. He could see a waving hand, then Morelos's brown, grinning face above the bullet-pocked edge of the bell cupola. The man's shout came down to him:

"Great business! You've saved our hides! But go round in back. Regarios and about fifty more of them are inside—"

From where he lay Downey squirmed around to call an order at his prone men. Then a soft cry came from Gahatmala. He followed the direction of the big Sikh's glance. The door of the city hall had just opened. A huddle of Nationalist officers and soldiers stood there, without weapons, hands stretched strainingly high above their heads.

THEY stood, Downey and Morelos, in the council room of the old building half an hour later. Before them on the floor was a black, drying puddle of blood. Behind them on the wall a jagged hole from a slow-spinning pistol slug ran into the rough plaster. Regarios, once President of this country, had placed the muzzle of his Colt automatic in his mouth here in this room some thirty-five minutes before, and forever opened the way for his successors.

Morelos spoke of that now, and of many other things. The man's face and eyes were flushed. He spoke rapidly, with many gestures, most of them directed right at the silent, haggard-faced American:

"You're a hero, *hombre!* You're the true savior and liberator of this place, not I. Look here—stay on with me. I'll make you Minister of Marine, of Posts and Education, Finance, or Vice President. You'll—"

A gesture of the other man interrupted him. Through the thick walls had just come the faint wailing of a steamer's whistle.

"The fruit steamer; she's in on time." Morelos said it slowly, with open reluctance, as if it were a fact which had to be faced, but might yet be very readily overcome. "Let me go on, Downey—"

"No, *hombre.* No." Downey uttered it as he would a command. "What is in that bottle there, behind the desk?"

"Rum."

"Pour me a tot, then. And you a tot. I've got three toasts to drink, all out of one glass, and at once. My last drink in Santa Rosa, or anywhere. Something I've said before, I think. But, now, the toast—to you, to me, to Santa Rosa. I'm ready to leave the town now. After—after ten years, this place and I are square . . . I got what I wanted, after all . . ."

He stood back from Morelos then, and his heels came together, and he saluted, as a soldier salutes.

"Adios, mi Presidente!"

Then he was gone. From a window in another room Morelos watched him go. Jubilant, hysterical peons tried to stop him outside, begged him to drink with them. He shook them off. Another group, big, fierce, bearded men, the Sikhs he had brought from the hills with him, tried to halt him also, then fell back and came to the salute. He went on, straightly, eyes ahead, toward the old white fruit steamer swinging at her hook in the harbor. Santa Rosa was behind him. It seemed that he had forgotten it—forever.

THE END.

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There was a stunning, ear-smashing roar

Bentfinger

Pounding vainly on a steel bulkhead in the hold of a sinking China Sea liner, Benson and the captain's daughter have reached the heart of the Bentfinger murder mystery—too late

An East-of-Suez Novel

By THEODORE ROSCOE

Author of "The Last Battle," "The Blade of Don Beltram," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

AN elusive, demoniacally clever murderer, who calls himself Bentfinger, is aboard the steamer Arcturus, Shanghai bound from Pahang. He has left a bloody trail across four continents, and his victims have always been robbed of precious jewels. A typed card which he leaves at the scene of his crimes, bearing his name, is the only clew to his identity.

Benson, of the American consulate at Pahang (who is telling the story) saw him commit a murder in the streets of Pahang, but all Benson could see was a twisted face and a flapping cape. Pursuing the murderer aboard the Arcturus, Benson was balked by a bulkhead in the depths of the ship behind which Bentfinger disappeared. Finding himself an involuntary passenger on the ship, Benson seeks Captain Lane, master of the ship, to tell him

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that Bentfinger is aboard. That night in the dining saloon the lights go out and the captain is shot dead just as he is about to make an announcement to the passengers concerning Bentfinger. One of that queerly assorted group fired the shot; is, in fact, Bentfinger.

Blair, who identifies himself as a Scotland Yard man, takes charge of the investigation, grilling each of the passengers in turn, and revealing that any one of them might be Bentfinger. There are blustering Major Phillipots, of the British Army, and his wife; the Reverend Norwood, a gaunt-faced and peculiar missionary; De Stroon, an offensive Dutchman; Gorn, a shrewd and self-confident silk buyer; Dr. Ernest Wonger Smartbeck, a querulous scholar; Hope Brown, the adopted daughter of the slain captain.

The finger of guilt points to all. A fire is set in the passengers' quarters that night. When it has been extinguished, several of the passengers discover that their staterooms have been ransacked. The body of the radio operator, who had disappeared, is found in a lifeboat. The radio is hopelessly smashed. First Mate Hague, who has taken command of the ship, decides to turn back to Trengganu and seek aid from the authorities there. A typed message from Bentfinger is found, demanding that the ship proceed toward Cambodia Point, or that some one aboard would die. When the warning is disregarded, the dead body of Norwood is found in his cabin, shot through the head.

Again Bentfinger warns, with one of his typed messages that appear from nowhere, that the deaths will continue unless his orders are obeyed. A storm strikes the ship at night. The figure of Bentfinger is sighted, and the passengers join in a mad scramble over the darkened decks in pursuit of the murderer. Benson follows him to the same bulkhead in the lower regions of the ship behind which Bentfinger had previously disappeared. Shortly after, the ship begins to sink. Searching for Miss Brown, Benson discovers that she is trapped behind that same bulkhead. She entered by a door, she says, but Benson cannot locate the bolt that releases the catch.

CHAPTER VIII (*Continued*).

BEHIND THE BULKHEAD.

"THINK!" I screamed. "What knob? Where?" And the eyes stuck out of my head, watching the water creep up that floor.

"I don't know!" her voice sobbed. "The door just opened. I'm in a little room. There's nothing on this side of the door. It's just—just flat. And there's no other way to get out!"

I'd have knocked the foundations out from under Gibraltar with that attack, but that bulkhead in the bowels of the foundering Arcturus was shut and shut to stay. Somewhere I'd missed the right knob. If I didn't find that knob I might as well be yelling "Open Sesame!" at the vault door of the United States Mint.

Once more I thumped over those bolts. To this day it makes me sick to hear a riveting-hammer or see girders laid on a bridge. For I pounded on those bolts till I founted sweat and blood, and the floor kept tipping steeper and steeper under my feet, water climbed to my heels, the voice through the iron slab weakened to a feeble echo, and the puzzle of the bulkhead's lock would not solve.

And then the preposterous occurred. There was a rending explosion. There

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was a *smash!* like the breaking of the axle of the world. The floor sprang out from under me. The walls bulged in and spat smoke. Tossed off my feet, I whirled through a gyroscope swirl of flying water, rope, paint and tin cans, went acrobating against the companion ladder, bounced back spinning like a top, and cracked head-on against the bulkhead.

And I hit the right knob! The door shot open like the lid of a Chinese trick-box. That partition yawned wide, and I flew through the opening, and the bulkhead slammed with a *wham!* And there I was, doubled against the wall of a narrow metal compartment—the strangest room in the world. The cave of Aladdin was an unfurnished hall compared to that secret cabin.

The compartment was all angles because the Arcturus was leaning on her beam, but even if set on a level that cabin was a place for astonishment. Walls, floor and ceiling of polished steel. A brilliant incandescent lamp glowing in the ceiling. A metal desk screwed to the wall, and fastened atop the desk a portable typewriter!

Fresh air blew from a funnel set high in one wall and whispered across the ceiling with a hobgoblin sound. A queer buzzing came from what appeared to be an electric furnace built into one of the narrow corners. Metal shelves laden with queer instruments—shiny forceps, torches, hammers, pipes, mortars—were set in the wall above the furnace. And there was a switchboard boasting brass handles and little plungers and rows of punch-buttons and wire plugs. Imagine a compartment ten feet long, eight feet high and four broad, resembling a physics laboratory and the control room of a submarine combined, and you'll have a faint idea of that cubicle.

Stunned, I glared at the high-voltage oven, that elaborate switchboard, the rows of strange instruments, that metal desk with its typewriter. Cotton cleared from my head, and I saw the girl. She was standing against the steel casement of the bulkhead, her poppy robe clutched tight about her small figure, her dark bob tousled and falling in curly disarray before her wide gray eyes. A cold fear wrought its expression on the pale oval of her face; and the heart turned to water in my chest. Not till then did I realize that the bulkhead had slammed shut behind me. And there wasn't a hook, knob or latch on the polished-steel inner surface of that bulkhead. No key to that hidden spring-lock. We were fastened, the girl and I, in a steel vault at the bottom of a sinking ship.

YES, the Arcturus was sinking! I could hear rushing water slap against the barrier shutting us in. Bubbles oozed through cracks in the metal casement. Somewhere beyond the walls of our steel prison things exploded with muffled thumps, echoed by a jarring bump that lifted me to my feet.

"How," I panted at the girl, "why—why'd you come in here?"

She reached out a hand. "I waited above for you. You must have passed me in the dark. I ran down into that hold—saw your tracks on the floor. I—I thought you'd gone through the bulkhead. When I pushed on it, it opened—" The whisper died on her lips with a strange sob. She wasn't reaching a hand. She was pointing. Pointing at my feet.

I suppose I jumped straight up in the air. For I was standing against that wall where the explosion had thrown me; and on somersaulting into that

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compartment, I'd landed atop a mound of little leather bags. One of the bags had split open, and was spilling something across my shoes that gave me a shock. My mouth unhinged with a snap! Like a dolt I stared, the eyes bulging out of my head. Do you know what was spilling from that bag?

"Emeralds!" Hope gasped.

Yes, emeralds! Emeralds as big as fat grapes. And diamonds and rubies and pearls! I moved my foot, and the leather bag emptied, and across the polished steel floor there scampered a glittering, twinkly cascade. I shouted; kicked at another bag, and the leather burst with a vivid flash. Ransom of forty kings scattered, twinkling, at my feet. A thousand rainbow-colored points of light danced, brilliant, across the floor; glittering, winkering, showering darts of red, green and blue fire that flamed in the mirroring steel walls like atoms escaped from the sun. You understand? There were those bags of fabled gems, there was that steel-bound room—and all *that* on a rotten tramp steamer going down in the South China Sea.

You wonder that I yowled like a maniac when I scooped up a handful of those livid little fires and found real jewels in my palm? It's no nice sensation—thinking you've gone raving mad. But the girl's arms were about me; I suddenly realized that tan-hued smoke was puffing out of the air-funnel overhead; dark water leaked across that incredible floor! There wasn't any time to waste for breath-taking. That bulkhead had to be opened. I hurled myself against the slab. The bulkhead did not move.

But a portion of the wall behind me moved! Hidden bolts creaked and a spring-lock binged! I heard a frightened scream from the girl. A damp wind smote the back of my neck. Leaping around fast, I was just in time to see a square of the polished wall at the far end of the cubicle drop inward. A stooped, dark figure stepped from this astounding aperture. The figure raised its head. And I was glaring at the face of the English silk buyer, Gorn.

Struck to stone Gorn stood, and so did the girl and I; and the glow from a dozen emeralds on the floor near the silk buyer's boots shed a witchy green light on his face. I can tell you he looked mad enough as his black eyes roved the cubicle, knifed at us where we stood against the bulkhead, and finally fixed on that little pile of gem-spilling leather bags. That magician's apartment with its typewriter and switchboard, trick trapdoors, queer furnace, and gems! Madness, I promise you. Yet the maddest of all in that aberrant scene was Gorn stepping through the hole in that steel wall, and holding in one hand the little blue-leather notebook that Blair had lost.

Gorn's other fist clutched a gun.

"Pick up those bags, Benson!" he growled in his throat. "Come on, girl. Move fast. She's sinking and we've got to hurry. You're both coming with me—"

I made a jump for him, but he saw it coming. Up lashed the gun-barrel; and I caught it. Square on the tip of the chin I caught it, and I dived in a shower of stars.

CHAPTER IX.

BENTFINGER!

HANDCUFFS on my wrists, my pockets weighted with leather jewel-bags, my jaw swelling, and the muzzle of Gorn's automatic ice cold on the nape of my neck, there was

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nothing for me to do but climb the narrow companion leading topside from the door in the steel wall. The girl was ahead of me, shackled, too; and I ground my teeth, ill with rage. She had given Gorn a battle. I could tell by the fresh scratches bleeding on his chin.

And I hadn't even touched the man. Now the only thing to do was wait for another chance. He'd withheld the fire of his gun, and at least we were not to be drowned like rats in a box, fastened in that vault-like compartment. But my head was spinning like a top, as my brain, dulled by knockouts and exhaustion, groped through the riddle.

That secret compartment. Trapdoors and a companionway hidden in the hull of the ship. Those bags of gems. And the appearance of Gorn carrying in his fist the notebook that had so mysteriously disappeared from Blair's hand! Gorn! Cold sweat oozed out on my cheeks.

"Hurry up!" he prodded fiercely. "Any more tricks and I'll let you have it! Move fast, or we'll never get out of here alive."

That was one bad moment for me, let me tell you. For myself I cared little. But to see the girl—Hope—trapped in this miasmic nightmare! Clenching my teeth, I fumbled along behind her.

Now that companionway was dark, the ladder began to spiral upward, tunneling between narrow walls. Giant catamarans seemed to be hammering against the wall on my left side, and I guessed there was nothing between us and the ocean save that plate of iron.

The wall against which my shoulder was wedged gave off a feeling of heat, and vibrated to a grinding and pounding that came from its other side. A choky smoke swirled about me, and I heard the girl cough.

We seemed to be climbing a chimney that leaned away from its base. Pawing up that crazy ladder, I moved past a red eye set in the dark wall. Smoke curled out of the eye, and it proved to be a hole about the size of a saucer. That hole looked into the engine room, and I caught a brief picture of hot inferno—peeped into a red, black and brass cavern jumbled with steep stairways, iron gratings, pipes going every-which-way. Smoke wreathed the railings and polished bars, and in the middle of the weird scene a pair of huge brass shafts moved up and down like pump handles gone lunatic in a madhouse of machinery.

"Step on it!" Gorn shouted. "You'll be out of this in a minute!"

"There's a door!" the girl cried; and I saw her small shoulders outlined in a square of dim light six feet above me. Gorn rammed me with his automatic, and I clambered to reach the girl. The door opened into a cabinet. There was a second door, swung wide. A moment later I was standing with Hope on one side and Gorn on the other, in an up-ended passenger's stateroom. Fingers of smoke writhed up the tilted floor, and the cabin was suffocating with the stench of burning grease, hot oil and tar. The cabin door banged, swinging on its hinges. Gorn shouted.

"Come on!"

No gainsaying the blaze of his black, beady eyes and the mouth of that massive automatic. Keeping us covered, he forced us through the cabin door. The corridor was topsy-turvy and black with smoke-gusts. Trying to shield the girl, I fought along through the smoke and found the alley leading to the deck outside.

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God knows I couldn't think. I remember tottering around on a tipping, slippery deck, scrambling through a maze of tangled gear, deck-tackle and rubbish, edging along close to the girl and waiting without nerves for a bullet to punch out my brains.

THE Arcturus lay groaning on her starboard beam in a battering, booming sea. Storming water blew over her port rail to sweep the deck with a screech. Red flares were flaming on her bow, shedding a crimson haze that tipped with queer light the wings and upper decks of the bridge and made blood-like the ocean that bounded over the fore deck. A score of ghostly figures dodged through the red and black maelstrom, chorusing faintly above the diabolical tumult.

But we were amidships, and my yells never traveled as far as the bridge.

Can you see me there, hanging to that shivery rail on that tipped-up deck, rattling the steel bracelets on my wrists, cursing, my face scarlet with welts and red paint and fire-glow, my pockets bulging with bags full of emeralds and diamonds and pearls?

Can you see the girl at my side, —shackled as I was, her face stricken with fear, her poppy robe blowing, water sluicing about her feet?

Can you see that hell-ship leaning over in the storming surf, waves sledging her windward beam, spray whizzing down her decks, water founting over bow and quarter, all black and banging and the moan of tortured metal save where that mushroom, maroon flare blossomed to make dim carnival in the blind and boiling night? And there was Gorn's dark figure jumping and dodging about us, wagging his gun, clawing through knots of gear, yanking at hawsers and iron bars.

Somehow or other there appeared a gap in the rail. Gorn dimmed out in a cloud of spray.

"Get your hands on this rope, you two! Quick! There's a boat below and we can make it! This way, Benson! Lively there! Give me a hand, or I'll shoot—"

Lord only knows how we managed to get ourselves in the boat and away. Vaguely I recall sliding, scrambling, inching down a wave-doused iron hill, Gorn's arm around my neck as I battled with manacled hands to keep a clutch on the girl. Nor do I know how Gorn contrived to keep his gun on my neck-nape, grapple with the snarled tackle, and, at the same time, cut the sea painter and set us adrift without capsizing.

There was one awful minute while Gorn fought with the steering oar, screeching at the girl and me to get our hands on oars and pull away, when that eggshell of a dory soared skyward on foaming water and threatened to drop with a smash on the flooded after house of the ship. Say this much for Gorn—he was a seaman. He got two handcuffed captives into a lifeboat and clear in water that boiled like a channel beneath Niagara.

And there I was, hauling on oar handles, square in the teeth of the storm. A comber snatched the dory to its crest, and we sped through the gale like a chip in a mill race. The Arcturus drifted far astern, a crimson smear in the shouting dark. Some time later the crimson smear faded out. Chill, clammy moisture brushed at my face. A weird, cottony, white smoke whisked and swirled through the darkness. "Row!" Gorn screamed; and I rowed. Above the drumming of

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blood in my ears I could hear the somber roar of tumbling surf.

FOG. There must have been dawnlight somewhere above, for the mist brightened and where our dory clove whitecaps clean rainbows shimmered. But the mist was an added terror. You could not see an oar's length off the bow. The vapor poured like white steam off the heaving, dark water, wreathing its clammy tentacles, puffing and blowing and conjuring cloudy ghosts that were quick to dissolve in gray spray. It was queer and terrifying. Three of us in a wooden eggshell lunging through creaming water. Our bobbing heads and struggling shoulders swimming a swirl of cold steam. You've seen fog on tumbling surf? But you've never seen fog such as smoked up that morning from the surf of the South China Sea. And I hope you never do.

I suppose I'd been rowing for two thousand years. My body had long since ceased to ache. My backbone was nothing but a twinge somewhere, my hands chunks of numbness on yanking oar-handles. The chill white vapor had drifted into my head. By twisting my neck I could look over my shoulder and see a pale oval of face behind me. Otherwise I wouldn't have cared.

Dimly I was conscious of hating something. Sometimes I thought it was the steel bands that gleamed on my wrists. Diabolical, those handcuffs. Just strong enough to bind me helpless; just loose enough to let me row. Then I would raise my eyes and see the dim figure crouched in the stern, gleams that were two black eyes, a glitter of set white teeth, a glint that was a leveled gun. How I hated that poised shadow that was Gorn! Gorn! Gorn with his dark face and flickery eyes crouched there in the stern, fighting with the handle of the steering oar, grim and devilish and holding me captive to his will.

"Row!" he bawled; and I rowed. A thousand wild schemes chased themselves across my brain. Tip over the boat. Make a sudden leap for that gun. Smash that face with the iron on my wrists. But there was the girl behind me—there was nothing to do but row.

I can't tell you how he steered us into the lagoon. I suppose it was a lagoon, for instead of boiling and smashing, the water beneath the fog settled into long, undulant swells and the dory swung along like a hammock. A thin shaft of amber light lanced through a hole in the swirling mist and picked out a patch of green seaweed. A rainbow arched through the vapor, and bottle-green water shimmered. Moving my head, I saw the girl as a shadow of poppy-color bent over her oars. Her forehead rested on her hands and the oars did not move, the blades swishing and bobbing in the cutwater.

Yes, Gorn still crouched in the stern. Water wiggled down his swarthy cheeks, dripped from the tip of his nose, pasted a sheaf of black hair across his forehead. A purple bruise swelled beneath his left eye and the daylight, struggling through the mist, gave a bluish tinge to his face. His white teeth grimaced, and a harsh whisper sawed out through his colorless lips.

"We're through— Lord knows how. There's—the fog lifting. There's a beach—a beach up ahead—"

His lips closed with a snap. He was balanced on his feet, hand upraised. From out of the wreathing vapor off our beam there stole a thin sound. A queer, squeaky chirping. A spectral

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mumbling. The creak of oarlocks and the echo of distant voices! The plash of a moving boat! Mouth open, I reared to my feet. Gorn whirled about with a throaty oath; stabbed out hard with the gun.

"Down, Benson!" he breathed fiercely. "Down on those oars, and row. One peep out of you, and you and the girl are done! Now, row like the devil! Row!"

A LUMINESCENT curtain, the thinning mists rose on a crescent stage of rice-white sand across which foaming battalions of breakers charged and dropped back in retreat. A steep hill, bare as a brown wall, backed the beach and raised its forehead against a sweep of clean, cobalt sky. Green nipa palms leaned seaward in the wind at the hilltop, and sunshine flooding down the slope and flashing on puffs of spray was so much liquid gold.

Our boat sped out of the fog bank high on the crest of a comber. Like a surf-board the little dory raced in a cloud of spume toward the beach. Voices yelled out of the vapor astern and were drowned by the shout of collapsed waves.

I'll never forget Gorn balanced in the stern of that speeding smallboat. Never. Like something of rock, he stood, feet braced on the heaving bottom-boards, his body bent into the wind. Sudden sunshine was white on his tense, corded face. His unkempt black hair was flying. The tails of his drill coat stood out stiff behind him as he clung to the steering oar, battling its blade through the foam. The eyes in his head were points of black agate, straining to catch the first break; and he took us into a burst of white spray with a triumphant yell.

One agonizing minute as the dory turned turtle in a thunderous watery cloud. One agonizing second while I somersaulted through a fountain of flying water and sand. Then I was floundering on hands and knees across the beach, spitting the tooth that an oar-handle had knocked out of my jaw, coughing up a lungful of salt water and watching, dim-eyed, as Gorn plunged out of the spume with the girl's limp figure in his arms. I shouted as I saw him make a staggery dash across the white sand and, still clutching her poppy-colored figure, start a run up that steepling hill. I squalled at him, and he squalled back at me, and somehow I got my legs under me and started after.

That impossible chase up the face of that sun-washed slope! Gorn legging it fast with a girl in his arms, sand scattering from his striving heels. I could see her limp arms; see the sunlight glinting on the metal that shackled her wrists. Holding my own manacled fists in front of me, I followed on legs of melting rubber, dazed, fighting for strength, fighting for a footing, fighting for every breath in my tortured lungs. Whence either of us drew the power to run the good Lord only can guess.

Do dead men run up steep hills? They do! Two dead men once ran up a hill on a tropical island, and one of them carried a girl in a poppy-colored robe. The other one carried handcuffs on his wrists and bags of giant jewels in his pockets and in his head a tiny spark of life that made him want to fight for the saving of that girl. I know, because I was that one, and I fought, at the hilltop, for the girl.

I caught Gorn at the hilltop, you understand, and fought. I suppose it wasn't much of a fight. I struck out

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with hands of tissue paper, trying to jam my steel wristlets into his face. He struck back with fists of cotton, yelling things I couldn't hear; and I'd been slugged in the head so many times of late that I couldn't feel the blows.

But there was a massive granite wall leaning between two tall palm trees. I bumped into the wall and fell down. Gorn leaned over me, grabbed at my belt, and dragged me over the stones. It was cool behind the granite wall. I lay on a bed of cool flagstones. Then Hope's marble-white face looked down at me. Her cheeks were wet and her gray eyes glistened and her brown hair blew about her shoulders. Somehow or other, her hands seemed to be free, and when she placed a trembling palm against my cheek I strove like Atlas and got up on one elbow.

THE next thing I saw was the cannon. An ancient, rusty cannon, mounted on slabs of basalt and poking its blunt, stub nose over the rim of the wall. A bizarre, dream-cannon it was, its barrel scribbled over with strange cornices and inscriptions, a brass two-headed lion couchant on its breech. I'd seen such pieces before—corroded green relics—but I thought they were all in the British Museum. "Presented to Her Majesty the Queen by King Sisowath of Ohore—Dec., 1840." Only this wasn't the British Museum. It was not. A ruined fort at the top of an island in Asia, it was; and there was Gorn, a black shadow dancing at the gun-breech.

"Powder!" He was panting to himself like a maniac; like a maniac clawing at the lid of an iron box that came from beneath the gun's grotesque breech. The lid unlatched, and a black trickle fell to the flagstones. *"Dry powder!"*

Unreal? Of course it was unreal. That massive granite fort wall crowning the hilltop. The sweep of unmarred blue sky, hot with early sunshine. The towering nipa palms standing sentinel against the blue. That ancient Siamese cannon that should have been moldering in a museum. And the grim, bedraggled jinni babbling at the cannon's breech. Unreal, febrile imaginings. The fag end of ululating nightmare.

And the worst thing about a nightmare is its seeming reality. Certainly I had scrabbled and yammered across the decks of a fearful tramp ship. There had been people, and some of them had been slain. There had been a crippled monstrosity with a toothless mouth, and fire and water and pain. Cards bearing a typed name. A man from Scotland Yard who wrote in a little blue leather notebook. A topsy-turvy hold and a bulkhead covered with bolts. A fantasy room with steel walls and a secret passage. A sinking ship and a lifeboat whirling through storm. Fog and a plunge through wild water. Now a hilltop and sunshine, an old fort and a relic cannon, and a goblin-creature who yelled about dry powder and waved a ragged arm.

I ticked the fancies off in my aching mind. Nightmares all. Only in nightmares do monsters vanish and appear, do you find strange bags of precious stones, do you fall through space, and strive for a girl, and groan in the power of a dark-faced wizard. In nightmares you try to yell, and can't. I tried to yell, and could not.

Then soft hands had captured my cheeks, and a girl's white face was real as the sunshine of day. Gorn was shouting and pounding on an old iron cannon; and I lay on my back behind a wall. Far-away voices chorused and called. Gorn was running up and

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down, stooped behind the stone barricade, cursing and croaking like a frightened crow.

The girl's face looked down at me, and hot tears fell on my cheek. Like a corpse come to life, I sprang to my feet. Gorn flung at me; caught me by the shoulders.

"Come out of it!" He shook me till the smashed clockwork in my head clanked. "Come out of it, Benson. You've got to help me! They've landed on the beach and they're coming up the hill! Wake up! Snap out of it! I tell you, you've got to help—"

White hands flew before my eyes and fastened in Gorn's wild hair. Have you ever heard a girl's voice low with fury? By Heaven, it pumped some blood back in my veins. "Leave him alone—he's hurt! I told you I'd stay quiet if you didn't harm him! Let him be. What are you trying to do—what are you going to do?"

"Get back!" Gorn snarled, and yanked her to one side. I stumbled over him, and he drove me to my knees. "They're coming up the hill, damn you. *He's* coming up the hill." He was shaking me again, and the teeth clattered in my jaw. "You understand? And I can't find a shot for that cannon!"

HE panted. Sweat poured down his face. Dropping to one knee, he tore at a flagstone with bloodied finger nails. "No use! Dry powder! Nothing to shoot!" His head twisted, jerked; his birdlike eyes darted quick glances from one side to the other.

Leaping up, he made a bound for the stone wall; clawed at the granite chunks. "Can't loosen them! Not a cannon ball in the place. Nothing—nothing to stop that cursed—"

"What are you doing? What are you going to do—" Hope knelt beside me. Her arm was about my shoulder, and her wind-blown hair was soft perfume against my cheek. She sobbed at the wild man, and he answered her with a snarl.

"You'll find out!" Darting to the cannon, he craned his neck and peered over the wall. "They're coming on. He's in the lead. *He* knows I'm unarmed. He knows I've nothing but an empty gun—"

"Empty gun!" I was reeling on my feet again, laughing like a hyena. Empty gun! This dark-visaged devil had been holding me captive with an empty gun. Plunging across the flagstones with a wail, I brought my locked fists down on his black head. But Gorn was a goblin that would not die. He went to his knees, but his arms were traps on my sick legs and I flopped over backward with a crash.

No drinker of absinthe could imagine what happened then. Those little leather bags of gems! Those little bundles of fabulous stones that had dragged like ton-weights in my pockets! We'd forgotten those jewels, Gorn and I; now they blazed into memory. For one of the bags burst open under my fall, and a shower of rainbow colors scampered across the sunlit flagstones.

Hope screamed. Gorn flung her aside and was on me like a catamount. Smothering my face with one hand, he robbed my pockets with the other, grabbing out the stuffed leather pouches and flinging them against the granite wall.

I couldn't get to my feet. I swear I could not. The sight of Gorn with his dripping, twisted face and frenzied hands snatching up those jewel-bags one by one and stuffing them down the mouth of that green Siamese cannon

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impaled me gasping where I lay. He stuffed those sacks down the mouth of that cannon, I say, his arm pumping in and out of the iron maw like a ramrod.

You needn't believe me—yet. I did not believe my own eyes. I managed to stand upright in the yellow sunshine of that place; and diamonds, emeralds and pearls crunched under my drunken boots. Once more I heard clamorous voices — a weird, human baying that seemed to grow louder and louder above the chant of distant surf. Hope stood against the granite wall, hands groping for support on the stone. Somehow I got to her side.

And when I looked down the slant of that hill bowling down to the beach I let a whoop out of my lungs that you could have heard on the Bay of Bengal.

On the glistening sands far below two lifeboats were smashed to kindling in the foam. One of those boats had belonged to us. The other belonged to them. And they were coming up the hill, all right. Coming up the hill on a run, crying out, waving hands, calling. De Stroon and Dr. Smartbeck and the Phillipotses. The bo's'n with the bald head and fan ears, three sailors with gleaming rifles, Hague and Blair.

They were water-soaked and wobbly, ragged and tattered and torn, but they came on through the sunshine like an army of the Lord. Blair ran in the lead, and how he ran. His garments showered water. His sandy hair blew. His face glistened bright in the sunlight. He was almost up the hill, and I yelled when I saw the pistol glint in his fist; saw the brave set of his jaw.

"Come on!" I screamed. "You'll catch him!" Waving like a lunatic I bounced atop the wall. "He isn't armed!" I screamed. "He hid the gems in the cannon and ran—"

BUT Gorn had not run, as I, right then, discovered. He had made one tigerish leap to the breech of the cannon, and that was as far as he went. Nor had he tried to hide those gems! A small metal matchbox fell from his fingers, and a puff of fire flared in his cupped hand.

Things happened fast. Blair came over the hill-crest on a bound, sighted Gorn, and sprang forward with his pistol spitting flame. Gorn's hand flew to the cannon-breech and the flare in his fingers dropped through a hole in the tail of the two-headed lion. There was a stunning, ear-smashing roar. One terrific, world-quaking sound-clap. A blinding spout of flame burst brilliant from the mouth of that cannon; flashed incredible lightning through the sunshine. No gun in God's world ever fired such shrapnel. No gun ever will, again.

Pearls, diamonds and emeralds volcanoed from the maw of that preposterous piece of oriental ordnance, lashed through the sunlight and struck Blair square in the chest. Not three feet from that cannon-mouth Blair had stood, and he made a red hole in the glare.

The strange red hole was a red ball bouncing down the hill. Ghosts farther down that hill screamed and danced to get out of the way. I got my face off a flagstone; made an insane rush at Gorn. He never lifted a hand to stop me, but he stopped me anyway. Leaning across the barrel of the smoke-spewing cannon, Gorn was pointing down the hill. His hand was palsied, but his face was chopped out of oak.

"Look! By heaven, look!" His

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lips formed the words, and the voice echoed up from a deep, deep well. "By heaven, Benson, look!"

I looked. I looked down that hill. I believe Gorn fumbled a key out of his pocket, unlocked my wrists, the girl came to take me by the hand, and the three of us ran downhill side by side. There were strange ghosts peopling the white, fine crescent beach. De Stroon, Dr. Smartbeck, the Phillipotses. Hague and the sailors and something else. That "something else" was the queerest, strangest ghost of all. I don't know how the others felt about it. I could hear them gargling and gurgling. As for me, I had to yell out loud to keep from going to pieces.

For there on the sand with its chest shot to shards lay the creature of an opium-eater's dream. Face up in the sunshine it lay, sprawled flat at the end of a crooked crimson path that marked its course down the hill. There was Blair's pistol in the twisted hand! There was Blair's soaked suit of clothes! There was Blair's shot-smashed chest! But the rest was a black, monstrous magic. A devil's thaumaturgy. An awful legerdemain. Blair had died on that hill-top, I tell you. But this *thing* lying dead at the foot of the hill— Listen!

The legs were twisted like bed-springs! The arms were malformed, bent awry at the elbows, boneless at the wrists! The hands were twisty-fingered, crippled claws! I've seen the death masks of Carrier and Marat in the chamber of horrors at Madame Tussaud's—they were b e a u t i f u l cameos compared to this one. For the eyes in this head were like little cups of blood. The right cheek bulged out. The left cheek caved in. And the lips, drawn back, grinned on barren gums!

There was more, I promise you. More! Embedded in that veined left temple was an emerald the size of a grape. Sunshine touched it and danced off, green and shocked. Green and shocked, too, Gorn stooped and plucked something from the scarlet that welled on the sand. A set of false teeth!

Gorn's whisper might have come from those teeth as they jiggled on his palm; the voice was by no chance human or his.

"*Bentfinger!*"

Mrs. Phillipots fainted at last.

CHAPTER X.

UNTANGLED THREADS!

YOU see some odd numbers on the oriental seas, but you never saw an odder lot than the passenger list of the Madame Chrysanthème. I guess the skipper of that Messageries Maritimes mail packet thought so, too, for the eyes stuck out of his head when he saw us on the wharf of the little island town. He looked almost as winded as the village priest who first saw us come up the beach. I suspect when we boarded the French steamer we were the oddest crowd of passengers in the world.

As for that d e c r e p i t old French steamer—well, she was a pleasure yacht, you understand. What if the bread from her galley wore whiskers and her cabins weren't white as blown snow? Who cared? She got us away from that frowsty island with its ghastly crescent beach and muttering reef where the masts of a ship jutted, grisly, out of the foam. She hurried us off down a blue and gold bay, and left clean horizon behind. A fine boat, the Madame Chrysanthème.

Her captain was a first class fellow,

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too. Out at the elbows, perhaps, and his walrus mustache needed fumigating; but a ship's master he was, acquainted with the finer points of his job.

Dr. Ernest Wonger Smartbeck craned out of his chair with a gulp. "I knew it!" The glasses waggled on his nose and he made a grandmotherish gesture. "I knew it all along, Mr. Gorn. I just knew *you* were a man from Scotland Yard!"

Major Phillipots withered the dandelion with a sneer and acid comment: "Rubbish!" and subsided, snorting through his nose.

Standing at the rail, Gorn soberly shook his dark head, his somber eyes studying the adhesive tape binding his wrist. "Shouldn't be surprised if you people had guessed it, at that," he mourned. "The mysterious way I tried to act. It might have been better if I'd owned up and clapped the lot of you in irons at the start. But I'd never have got *him*, if I had. And I had to get him at all costs. That's what the chief said. 'Get Bentfinger at all costs.' I might have saved Norwood and the steward. And, yet—" Gorn sighed and twisted a fist on the ship's rail.

"Well, poor blighters, it couldn't be helped. The others—the radio operator, Captain Lane, the French sailor on the Pahang wharf—I had no way of saving them. No means of knowing—"

De Stroon was munching a sandwich and for a moment there was no other sound. I fumbled at the tight bandage on my head; watched purple, glassy water slide by abeam. Andrew Hague halted an uneasy pacing of the deck, mopped his seamy forehead with a tattered sleeve, and groped for words. "But, Mr. Gorn. I—I can't believe it, that's all. None of it. There are so many—so many things. Every time I think of what happened back there on the beach, I—just can't understand how—"

"I know," Gorn said. "And that's why I called you all out on the deck this evening. I think I've got it figured. Want to check up for my reports, too. And I want you to know the how of it, and go over the affair with me. Suppose I go back to the day the chief called me on the case.

"It was the day after the Bentfinger murder in Marseilles. You'll recall that Bentfinger had previously made a diamond haul in New York City, stolen a ruby tiara and slain the watchman in a Regent Street shop, and murdered a Scotland Yard inspector in London. The Yard was at its wits' end. Efforts to trail the killer had proved fruitless. We knew we were pitted against a master mind; a criminal, deadly genius. A fiend who hid his trail in a confusion of false clews. A dead shot with a pistol. No ordinary criminal. The audacity of the little typed card told us that. The pearl robbery and murder in Marseilles proved it."

GORN nodded, went on: "The chief sent for me. 'Inspector Gorn,' he said, 'it's up to you. Get Bentfinger. Go to world's end, if you must, but get Bentfinger at all costs!'

"I flew to Paris, grabbed the first train south, hit Marseilles thirty hours after the murder. Our lads on the job had found nothing. We combed the town. Hunting needles in haystacks. But I had one tiny clew. We were almost certain the killer had fled London on a boat. I'd studied the shipping reports. The sailing time of a steamer was found to check. The Arcturus, of

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the Champion Line had left London River and Marseilles Harbor within an hour of the Bentfinger killings."

Gorn waved a hand. "Not much to go on. But I had the Yard busy looking up the Arcturus. Meantime I juggled with the French police, following a lot of blind alleys. Finally the report on the Arcturus came in. The Champion Line had cabled from the States. The Arcturus had been leased to an American shipper on some sort of fishy deal whereby the line could not divulge the lessee's name, the boat was practically owned by said lessee, and carried tramp cargo for said lessee. This party had paid promptly on the contract and put the Arcturus into Liverpool for alterations, the nature of which the Champion office did not know, footing all bills.

"The boat had started on a vagabond trip to the Asiatics under the Champion Line flag. That was all the Yard could find out about the Arcturus, and there was no official way of digging further into the business. Still it sounded a bit funny."

"It was a bit funny," Hague offered. "I signed on the ship just after she came out of Liverpool dry dock. Captain Lane signed me on. We made a run or two into New York, loaded so light we had to carry sand ballast. Captain Lane told me he didn't know where we'd be heading next. Always seemed uneasy about his orders. Didn't quite know who he was working for, he said."

"That's because his sailing orders were sent by the lessee through the Champion Line offices," Gorn suggested. "And the lessee was—Bentfinger. Of course I knew nothing of all that. I only had a hunch that Bentfinger might have jumped London and Marseilles on the Arcturus.

"Then the news flashed that Bentfinger had struck in Cairo, and when I discovered the Arcturus had cleared Egypt for India the same day, I played a long chance and chased the boat. Speed boats, trains, liners, airplanes got me to Bombay, and I found the Arcturus in port. When I heard the ball in the Asian Queen Hotel was due that night, I played another weird hunch. Right. Bentfinger struck in Bombay—almost under my nose. In an effort to look over the Arcturus I'd booked passage on the boat. I sailed with her at midnight.

"You know how and why I had an eye on this poor girl, Miss Brown. While we cruised for Pahang I played in with the passengers, watched. Certainly the girl was suspicious. And then I spotted Norwood."

Everybody gasped. "Norwood!"

"I'LL tell you about him," Gorn went on. "I knew him, but he never knew me. I've a memory for faces, and I'd seen his years before in the files. Planter named Woods. Escaped from a Singapore prison while waiting trial for a homicide in Trengganu. I suppose he went into the mission field to hide his past. A murder in Trengganu. And that's why he never went ashore in Bombay or Pahang; why he was beside himself when Mr. Hague turned the ship back for Trengganu. But I didn't let on I knew him. A chance he was Bentfinger. I wanted to make sure.

"Then we were in Pahang River. You recall how it rained? I had to go inshore, get word from Bombay and send cables to London. I'd cabled the chief from Bombay, asking for another man. I found a cable in Pahang. A week-old message from the London office, saying another operative would

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be on the boat and get in touch with me. I judged the chief was rushing a man to catch the Arcturus. I supposed he'd locate a lad in Bombay. I didn't think the operator would reach me till we made Shanghai. I was wrong.

"That second Scotland Yard man was right on hand the day the Arcturus was to leave Pahang. I think he was on his way to catch the ship while I scribbled cables in the Pahang police headquarters. But Bentfinger met that man from the Yard, pierced his disguise somehow, and killed him on the water front."

Gorn nodded. "Yes, the French sailor was the Scotland Yard man sent to join me. I should have guessed from Benson's story. Would Bentfinger have bothered with the tracking and killing of a mere sailor? Would a French navy man be liable to recognize the fiend and speak his name? No. That sailor was an operative. Bentfinger killed him; robbed his official papers.

"But Benson happens to stumble across the murder; gives chase. Bentfinger makes a dash for the Arcturus, and leaves a trail that ends before a locked bulkhead in the ship's after hold. That bulkhead was actually the door to a secret compartment built between that hold aft and the engine room.

"I believe Bentfinger must have built that cubicle when the ship lay in drydock; built it in secret. An amazing compartment, contrived so that none would know of it, it served as his control room. I suppose the sailors thought the bulkhead was jammed shut and only led into the engine room. The engineers saw nothing but an ordinary partition—"

"Blimey! That's right!" The bo's'n with the bald head tugged at one of his ears. "I tries to open that bleedin' bulkhead, meself, once. I tells Cap'n Lane it's jammed shut, an' 'e says let it be."

"No doubt his orders from higher up," Gorn explained. "At any rate, there was that room where Bentfinger could store stolen booty. His typewriter. Electric ovens. A chemist's outfit. A switchboard. By manipulating plugs in that switchboard you could time a contrivance that would turn the ship's lighting plant on and off. Then a s e c r e t companionway built in the ship's hull led to a stateroom off the main deck corridor. The upper door of this secret companion opened into the cabin cupboard.

"That's how Bentfinger gets from the after hold to the main deck. He knows Benson is after him. Decides if trouble comes he will play the man from Scotland Yard; erases the real operative's name from the papers and writes in his own.

"Meantime, the ship has left Pahang. Bentfinger—as Blair—watches the deck; sees Benson go to the captain's cabin; overhears the captain saying he will have something to tell the passengers in the s a l o o n at eleven o'clock. Captain Lane knows and suspects too much. Captain Lane must die. Bentfinger sets the switch on his control board, timing the ship's lights to go out at the proper moment.

"However, the wireless operator must be slain first, the radio put out of commission. While you, Benson, change your garments in the captain's cabin, while the rest of us chat in the dining saloon, Bentfinger murders the radio operator, smashes the wireless, hides the dead body in the lifeboat. Then, suave and smiling, he comes out of the darkness and rain as Blair, joins the passengers in the saloon.

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"Now the stage is set. I'm busy studying Benson, the strange newcomer. Captain Lane makes his appearance; he is distraught. He has gone to the radio room, discovered the damaged outfit. His operator is gone. Bentfinger is somewhere on his boat. Perhaps he had guessed this before—we have no way of knowing. At any rate, he walks into the saloon, and is shot when the lights go out. And Blair does the shooting. Grabs out his gun, leans across the table in the dark, fires, hurls the weapon through the porthole he has seen opened. The lights flash on."

GORN shrugged. "I? I cannot tell who fired that shot. I tell you, that was one bad minute for me. But I decided to wait under cover and let the rest of you, if possible, betray yourselves. Bentfinger was right there in that room. There was his card. I picked it up to see. Yes, it matched the others I had seen. I was on the point of arresting Norwood and the girl, when Mr. Hague spied the yellow glove that had come from under Blair's chair. That glove was a hitch in Blair's plans, I believe. In yanking the gun from his pocket he had pulled the glove out by accident. Now he shows his ace card; claims himself a Scotland Yard man.

"How was I to know? Headquarters had told me a Scotland Yard man would be on the boat. There were the official papers. Blair's story about being sent to watch another party, then switching to the Bentfinger case, was plausible. For all I could tell, he might have been watching Norwood, you see.

"I tried like the devil to remember if there'd been a new man on the force named Blair, but in the wild flurry I couldn't remember. I didn't like the looks of it, though; decided to play Gorn, the silk buyer, for a while longer. If Blair was from the Yard, all right. If not—

"But he played the part so skillfully, I thought he was. He did exactly as I'd have done with the investigation, skillfully hiding his real identity by the masquerade. Meantime he threw suspicion on everybody else. I believe he was on guard, too. If the Yard had sent a man to Pahang on his trail, perhaps there was another Yard man about.

"By taking our guns he drew the teeth of all of us. He could examine us, too. I think he was more than suspicious of me, especially when he found that French railway ticket among my faked-up business letters.

"Do you begin to see his game? It was he who set fire to the linen in the empty cabin after locking us in the staterooms. Dropped a match in the cabin door when none of us were looking, let us say. Then, in the smoke and alarm, when we ran for safety, Blair dashes into my cabin for a look. Thank God, he didn't find the handcuff sets concealed in my valise. At the same time, *I*, under cover of the confusion, went into his cabin. Took a look at Benson's stuff, too, by the way. Finding nothing in his hasty search of my effects, Blair runs to the bridge."

"That's right," Andrew Hague said. "After shutting you all in your staterooms that first time, Blair came to the bridge. Then he went back to the corridor. That's when he could have fired the linen. He was back on the bridge when the fire call blew. He fled off in the smoke; came back to meet me just as I was dashing off to round up these passengers."

"Exactly. And had you, Mr. Hague,

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decided to head the boat back to shore before you made this intention known to the passengers?"

"I had. And Blair had approved the idea. Even urged it."

"He never wished it, though. You see, he knew it was coming, prepared the warning, and pinned it on the door of the wheel house while the ship was in an uproar. Then he rejoined you and the rest of us. We returned to the corridor, went again to our respective cabins.

"Then you discovered the note of warning. Now he—Blair—had wanted to head off for Cambodia, you see. To carry out the threat in his first Bentfinger note, he crawled through his porthole, sped around the storm-darkened deck, picked Norwood as his victim. How this was done he himself later explained. But—"

"But, great heavens, Mr. Gorn!" Major Phillipots cried. "How did Blair ever get through his stateroom porthole out to the deck—"

"You'll understand later. Now Blair, as Bentfinger, has killed Norwood, carried out the threat of the note. He gets back into his stateroom; Mr. Hague, having found the warning, calls everybody into the corridor; Blair, playing the Scotland Yard man, investigates. There we find Norwood slain by Bentfinger. And it was at that time I got a chance to do a little investigating of my own. You see, I'd come across something. That little leather notebook in which Blair had pretended to outline the incidents of his case."

A FAINT smile played about Gorn's lips. "Do you remember what happened? We were standing, terrified, in the corridor. Blair drew the notebook from his pocket. I was standing near him at the time, and I spied something he'd written in that notebook. In his effort to play the part of the Englishman from Scotland Yard, conducting a police record and keeping a case book and what not, he'd overplayed his hand.

"Oh, the notes he'd written looked genuine enough. But the date, you understand. The *date!* That's what I spotted. I must get a better look, make sure, get hold of that book. The ship rolled, we tumbled in a heap, and I snatched the notebook out of Blair's hand."

"But he said there was something important in that book," Hague recalled. "Was that just a stall? Just to make us think he was a real detective and—"

"Exactly," Gorn pointed out. "Blair had to play up his faked sleuthing; pretend he was getting somewhere. As a matter of fact, there *was* something important in that book, but *he* never knew it. Yes, he wanted to stall us there in the corridor. You see, the Arcturus had already turned back for Trengganu—the last place Blair himself wanted to go. Blair wanted to keep us out to sea, you understand. He must do this by terrorizing the crew.

"Now just after setting fire to that stateroom, Blair had crossed the deck, wearing his Bentfinger impersonation. Intentionally he showed himself to the steward. He knew the steward would spread the story. And he stalled us there in the corridor waiting for the new alarm. Meanwhile, the incident of the notebook took place. I suspect Blair was pretty puzzled, wondering why one of us would steal that book from him. No doubt he believed the thief feared the book held incriminating evidence. Never in the world did

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Blair suspect that he'd written something there among his trumped-up notes that showed he was *not* an Englishman from Scotland Yard!

"But then the steward appeared with his story; told of seeing that weird cripple in the dark. Obviously, none of us could be the deformed monstrosity. Apparently Bentfinger was at that moment skulking the storm-dark decks. Blair affects fear, pretends to go after our guns. Presumably to arm us, he runs to his stateroom.

"You remember how long it seemed b e f o r e he came back? That was because he must have dashed down that s e c r e t companionway to his cubicle, typed the second warning, flung it through the peephole into the engine room, sped back to the corridor. He told us the guns had been stolen. Matter of fact, they were still in his stateroom cupboard where he locked them, unloaded.

"As for me, I'm stumped. I'm crazy to get a look at the notebook hidden in my pocket, and I'm nonplused by the steward's wild s t o r y. And Blair is hardly back among us before the engineer comes running to us with the second Bentfinger note.

"We rush out to the deck. Hague swears he won't turn the boat. Blair must keep good the Bentfinger threat, and thus he pretends to find the body of the radio operator which he has previously p l a n t e d in that lifeboat amidships. Blair wants to keep that ship away from the shore. He wants to frighten Mr. Hague and the officers into turning about.

"Again, he pretends to catch sight of Bentfinger on the after deck. Leading a chase aft, he disappears. We think he has gone below, and while we hunt below decks Blair hides in the dark; assumes the mask of the killer. He sees us come topside again. But Mr. Benson and Miss Brown are still below somewhere. When the rest of us run forward the killer waits; he catches Benson off guard and attacks. But Benson fends off the murderer's bullet, gives fight, *gets the cape.* By the way, Benson, did you examine that cape?"

I confessed I did not. "I think I dropped it somewhere. In the excitement—"

CORN nodded. "It was lost. But I think if you'd look at it closely you'd have found it of very delicate weave and manufacture. A fine silk or mercerized cotton. The sort of cloth that folds into a very compact, small bundle and may be carried in a pocket. Blair could yank out that cloak the way you'd draw a handkerchief, and put it on in a trice.

"But he'd lost his cloak. In the darkness he made a dash for the bridge while the rest of us rush aft to answer Benson's outcry. And now the Arcturus is only a few miles offshore. Determined to f u r t h e r his terrorism scheme, Blair encounters the steward under the bridge and promptly shoots him dead.

"His cries bring us running; there we find him, as Blair of Scotland Yard, with the dead man in his arms. And now I'm certain that somehow or other Blair is Bentfinger, or at least an ally of the crippled monstrosity. I must get another look at the notebook and try to get my hands on a gun.

"And a lot of things happen, suddenly. Things Blair himself has not counted on.

"The Arcturus runs aground, battered by the storm. The crew forward of the bridge, terrified, out of control, mutinies. The sailors attack the bridge,

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and Blair finds himself caught in an unexpected battle.

"This gives me a chance I've been waiting for. While the rest of you, Blair included, are fighting on the bridge, I rush back to the deserted corridor. Another look at Blair's faked-up case book and I'm convinced. But how has he managed to escape his stateroom at various times, unseen?"

"I dash into his cabin. There's the cupboard where the guns had been stowed. Blair had said the lock was broken. It wasn't. I break it, and find the guns inside the cupboard. More. In the back of that cupboard is a little door. I smash through the door and discover the hidden companionway. Benson can tell you how I came down into the cubicle and found him locked in there with Miss Brown. And now I had to get the two of them out of there and away, for the ship was foundering. I saw what I'd have to do.

"Benson was almost out on his feet. He and the girl would think *me* a criminal, and give me a fight before I could explain. And I never had time to explain, you can see that. I had to knock out Benson, get handcuffs on him and the girl.

"Luckily, before exploring Blair's stateroom I'd gone to my own and armed myself with the cuffs. Now I could take care of Benson and the girl. It was a job, though. I had to bluff plenty with the empty gun to get them out of there. And there'd been an explosion in the engine room just as I was climbing down that companion. Gave me a fall and I'd sprained a wrist. It was touch and go with these two captives of mine. I had to make Benson carry the bags of jewels—"

"Those jewels!" Hope cried. She was reclining in the deck chair beside me, and she'd been listening to Gorn's recital with bated breath. (The rest of us had been listening, too, I can tell you!) Now Hope could not contain herself. "Those gems, Mr. Gorn. Where—"

THE detective chuckled. "Amazing, weren't they? Listen. It's the most astounding part of Blair's scheme. You see, it was his idea to travel the world and steal the world's most priceless gems. A perfect diamond. A perfect ruby—emeralds, pearls. Hidden, there, in the bottom of that dowdy old ship where no one would suspect, he would stow the booty. And at night, while the ship slept, he worked down there. Doing what?

"Why, the man was a master counterfeiter. He was making paste copies of those stolen gems. Making untold fortunes, for he could keep the originals and sell the paste imitations to fences and go-betweens who would think themselves buying the original article. Why, he could make millions. Millions.

"The minute I saw those instruments, that electric oven—I knew. But the ship was sinking. No time to stand around, examining things. I got Benson and the girl topside and into a lifeboat somehow. I saw Blair and the others go overside on the bow. I thought they were done for. Heaven knows how the three of us in our boat ever got into that island lagoon. But we did. And when I heard the voices, heard the other boat in the fog, I knew I was up against it. If I was caught I'd be shot dead and Blair would get away with the goods. He'd then have properly murdered the rest of you, too.

"But I spotted that old fort atop

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the hill. And when I found the cannon—well, I guess we can all blow old Lady Luck a kiss, what? That old cache of dry gunpowder was her kindliest gift. But I want to tell you I was in a fix when I could find nothing to shoot."

Gorn mopped his face at the memory and smiled. "Benson was giving me plenty of trouble, too; plenty. But poor Benson was out on his feet. And lucky for all of us, too.

"At any rate, I remembered how those old Napoleon-type guns would shoot iron balls or stones or crushed rock or anything. And I couldn't find anything until Benson and I spilled the fake gems. Sardonic, isn't it?"

Gorn grinned. "Dashed trick of fate that Blair or Bentfinger or an American shipper, or whatever he was, should have been shot to death by the very gems for which he had ravaged and slain and terrorized society. Killed by priceless bullets of his own making—"

Gorn's voice drifted out behind a smile. How quiet, then, it was on that twilight-bathed deck of the Madame Chrysanthème. How like sticks we sat in our deck chairs; Hague and his sailors, the Phillipotses, De Stroon and Dr. Smartbeck, and Hope and I. On the forecastle calm bells tinkled to change the watch, and a lookout's voice hailed. My companions seemed unable to speak, and at last I had to ask the question for them.

"But, Mr. Gorn," I blurted, "how did you know? What *was* in that little notebook? How—how did that notebook give Blair away? A date or something, you said. And—and how—how *could* he"— I was remembering that horribly crippled monster who struck at me through a flash of lightning on a wild deck. "How could Blair have been Bentfinger? That face! Those twisted arms and—and legs like crooked sticks—and—and how—I mean like a Jekyll and Hyde transformation—" I was thinking of Blair coming over the hillcrest, a flash, then a red ball bounding down the slope, and that monstrous thing dead on the beach below. "How could it have happened, that's all?"

"I'LL tell you," Gorn said quietly. "The date in the notebook? Well, Blair was pretending to be an inspector from Scotland Yard. An Englishman." Seeking in his coat, Gorn produced the little blue leather booklet. "Now, an Englishman writes a date a certain way. He writes the day first, then the month, then the year. Thirteenth July, Nineteen hundred and ten. Always in that order. An American writes the *month* first, then the day and year. July thirteenth. That's the way an American writes a date. That" —Gorn waved the notebook—"is the way Blair wrote it here. Master mind, master gunman and chemist, master of disguise, Blair had his British accent perfect—and slipped up on a tiny point of form. But the disguise—the Bentfinger monstrosity—

"Well, Benson, it *was* a real Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde transfiguration. In Stevenson's marvelous tale, the handsome and kindly Dr. Jekyll turned himself into the ugly and malformed character, Hyde, by drinking a magic potion. And finally the Hyde character became so powerful that it would come out of Dr. Jekyll of its own accord.

"In Blair's case it was almost the same. But Blair didn't turn into Bentfinger by any fiction-book magic. You remember, Benson, the terrifying way he seemed to change, dwindle in size

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as he ran down that Pahang pier? And how Blair got out of his porthole?

"Listen. Once in a lifetime a freak is born. A double-jointed freak who can, by muscular control, contort his limbs, atrophy the muscles of his face, even stop the blood in his veins. In half a second he can bring on a self-induced partial paralysis, double his spine into a hunched twist, knot his hands, unjoint his shoulders, arms, legs, become a thing of rubber and bunched muscle. There you have your explanation.

"Blair could force himself, almost without shoulders, through a porthole, or spit out his false teeth—and how that will alter any face!—and make of his body a wretched thing. And when he died with his chest shot away, the freak muscles of his body assumed, in the cold of death, the contortions to which he had habituated them. Yes. Blair—an India-rubber man. And he died in true character—Bentfinger—the fiend that he was."

Gorn sighed, moved through a silence of stone, eased himself into a chair.

"That's all," he said cheerfully, "and I'm dashed glad of it. I'm two hundred years old right now. My apologies to those of you I suspected wrongly. Everybody told such strange stories, gave such odd accounts of themselves and all. What with alibis and aliases, I hardly know who's who. I was sure Miss Brown had given a false name, for example. I wouldn't be surprised, Miss Brown, if that was not your name at all—"

"It isn't," Hope laughed. And then, because a girl just can't keep a secret: "Go ask the funny little captain of this boat. He changed it for me this afternoon. I'm Mrs. Benson now—"

I could hardly believe it yet, either, and thank Heaven Mrs. Phillipots took her eyes from my blush.

"Oh, dear," she offered, "I think I'm going to faint from the excitement—" And she did.

THE END.

World's Greatest Auction

THE modern auction traces its origin back to Babylon, where the village maidens were given in marriage to the highest bidders. But the greatest auction ever held was that of the Roman Empire, when the Prætorian Guard put up the throne. Didius Julianus outbid Sulpicianus and the throne was "knocked down" to him at his figure. History fails to record the amount involved. But the purchaser soon repented of the bargain, for he was condemned and put to death by order of the Senate, two months later, in 193 A.D.

The Dutch auction is, strictly speaking, not a genuine auction. It is an arrangement whereby an article is offered at a high price which is gradually lowered until a purchaser is found.

In England it has been the custom to place an inch of lighted candle near the auctioneer, and the person making the last bid before the fall of the wick becomes the purchaser.

Chick Levere.

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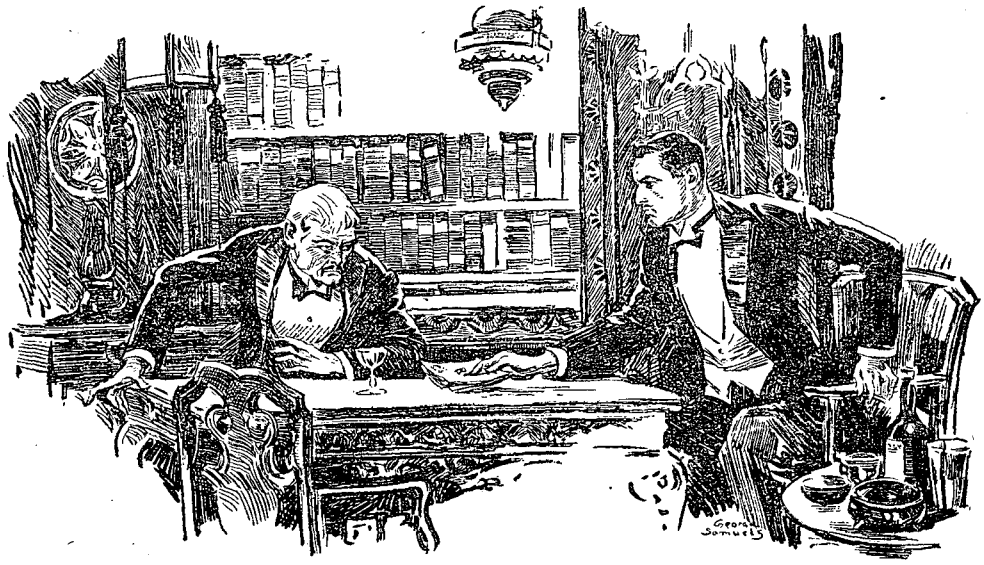

"Here is ten thousand pounds," said Connor to the incredulous Russian

A Prince For Sale

His companions of the China clubs and legations thought Vincent Connor a wealthy playboy; but his "play" was matching wits in tight places against wily Oriental intriguers

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

IN Bristow Road, Tientsin, were located the head offices of the various Connor enterprises, inherited or acquired by that singular young man, Vincent Connor, rumored to be one of the wealthiest foreign business men in all China. Good will, in that ancient land, counts for a great deal, and various people who had predicted the break-up of the Connor interests after they had passed into the hands of a polo-playing, seemingly idle heir, were at a sad loss to account for the way their prophecies came to naught. But then, very few people were in the confidence of Vincent Connor.

He had just finished the morning mail, and was on the point of departing for the Tientsin Club where he resided nominally, when a special delivery letter arrived. It proved to be from Chang, his father's native partner, who conducted the up-country end of the Connor business from Nanking, the new republican capital. The note, written in flowing Mandarin, was cryptic.

> If you have forty or fifty thousand dollars gold to invest, seek Prince Photo at the Pavilion of a Thousand Delights, at Fuchow. The south is far away, except for the merchant who bargains as he goes. It is for you to find one Colonel Moutet of the French embassy, who also travels south.

Connor was tempted to laugh at this, but knew better than to laugh at any message from Chang, who was in most

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intimate touch with China's affairs. Also, as it happened, he did have ten thousand pounds, an intended bribe recently acquired from certain unscrupulous gentry, whose point of view regarding the future of China did not coincide with that of Connor.

"Prince Pho-to — huh!" grunted Connor, skepticism in his dark-blue eyes, a frown upon his wide-jawed, wide-angled features. Yale had not dimmed his childhood grasp of China's tongue or customs; and in the two years since taking over the business, he had gone far in knowledge.

"That's no Chinese name; sounds like Annamese, or else a joke," he reflected. "And Fuchow! Why the devil go away down there? Still, old Chang has scented something, sure enough. Better look up this chap Moutet. He must be around these parts, if Chang said to find him."

Apparently no easy task, in a city that held the flotsam of half a dozen nations, from Russian refugees to Italian exiles, and teemed with business and intrigue. Therefore Connor was somewhat startled to run slap upon his man at the first cast—to find him, indeed, a guest at the Tientsin Club, and to see him sitting at a table across the room as he lunched.

He studied the man, sensing an adversary. Moutet was forty-odd, gray at the temples, with the hard, precise features of a martinet, a steel-trap mouth, black eyes merciless as steel. Evidently a man in rigid self-restraint, therefore an extremist who would not know how to relax in moderation. Half a dozen decorations. Lithe, active, vigorous. Connor made up his mind on the instant; he needed information, first of all, and swiftly weighed different schemes. No, he must use the bungalow—his disguise would not do for a long trip. Besides, he had no need of it in the south, where he was unknown.

Thus resolved, he took prompt action. Moutet, he discovered, was in charge of a typically French "mission" at Mukden, was now on leave, and was one of the most important French undercover officers in Asia—in other words, a semi-secret agent cloaking his diplomatic work behind scientific and industrial work. Down south in Yünnan, a French colony in fact if not in name, the Connor interests had large timber monopolies, under the name of the Laoyang Company. Upon these facts Connor based his action.

His "bungalow" was in reality a mandarin's pleasure palace, which his father had converted into a residence. Connor rarely used it; Hung, the old family servitor, remained in charge. So, at two that afternoon, Connor called up Hung on the wire from his club rooms.

"A dinner for two, at eight to-night, Hung," he said. "Chinese style, but with cocktails and no rice wine. With the first few courses serve that Vouvray '16, and plenty of it. With the later courses, the Château Spire '97, in the large goblets. Afterward, the Napoleon cognac. And plenty of that, also."

IT was no difficult matter to reach Colonel Moutet by telephone, and once he had his man, Connor spoke in his none too good French, using the high, sing-song tones that went with his assumed character.

"This is M. Wang Erh Yu of the Laoyang Company—the timber interests in Yünnan," Connor said. "I am the vice president and general manager, and there are several matters of

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policy which I should like to discuss with you. If M. le Colonel will honor me with his company at dinner, at my residence here—"

Colonel Moutet was not averse to dining with a wealthy Chinese, and Connor arranged to call for him later.

His nostrils widened and lips thickened by cotton pads, his black hair coarsened with grease, his sunburned features and hands yellowed by a saffron infusion, his European garments cunningly tailored to give an air of awkwardness, "Mr. Wang" carried off his dinner guest promptly on time, to a dinner such as Moutet had seldom eaten, with wines which the appreciative Frenchman found miraculous. Mr. Wang himself ate very little.

There was enough talk of business to appease any possible suspicion—tentative agreements made, plans discussed. Moutet proved to be sympathetic, sternly bound by orders, with a clear understanding of native problems and customs; he had a fanatical regard for duty, though when Mr. Wang mentioned the recent revolt in Annam, Moutet did not hesitate to express his contempt for bureaucracy. The old brown cognac loosened his tongue a bit, perhaps.

"Between ourselves, of course," said the colonel, "the whole affair was incredibly bungled. Whole villages were destroyed and needless air bombardments were carried out. The penal commission was illegal. The executions and sentences were barbarous. That is no way to make the Annamese love us! They are burdened with intolerable taxes. Some day, mark me, there'll be an explosion in Annam."

"Because of stupid oppression?"

"Yes." Moutet shrugged. "Plenty of us see the mistakes; what can we do except carry out orders? I myself leave to-morrow on a most unpleasant, even degrading errand—yet I must do my best. Look at the opium monopoly, despite the decrees of the Chamber in Paris!"

"Did you ever," queried Mr. Wang carelessly, "hear of an Annamese mandarin or ruler by the name of Pho-to? I've heard the name; I cannot recall in what connection."

"Hm!" Colonel Moutet started, but instantly became casual again. "Yes, a good deal was heard of him down there. The heir to the throne, or so called, and a man greatly loved and revered by natives. A dangerous man, from our viewpoint. I understand he has brains and has made foreign contacts. He was involved in the revolt, but fled into Chinese territory somewhere. No one knows just where he is, I believe."

Mr. Wang blinked behind his thick spectacles. "Indeed! Let us hope that French rule will save Annam and Yünnan from the chaos which has enveloped China!"

Later, Mr. Wang took his guest back to the club—and thirty minutes later was packing his own bag, preparatory to catching the boat leaving for Shanghai in the morning.

"Evidently," he reflected, "this excellent colonel is going to see Prince Pho-to, and will perform his errand to the letter, even if it revolts him. It must be disagreeable indeed! Probably it is even illegal; so much the better."

He did not forget to pack the ten thousand pounds in crisp black-and-white Bank of England notes.

ON the way to Shanghai, Connor saw little of Moutet; there were other French officers aboard and all flocked together, after the manner of their caste.

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It was different after changing to a Merchants' Line boat for Fuchow. Their mess seats were together, and acquaintance began with the first meal; Connor's name was unknown to the Frenchman, since the various Connor enterprises went by Chinese names, and Moutet was far from recognizing Mr. Wang in this scrupulously dressed young American.

It was late afternoon when they entered the Min River and bore up for Pagoda Anchorage, for the transfer to steam launches. Here Moutet departed in the French consular launch, and Connor went on to the city, nine miles above, by the regular craft, landing at the Hwang-sung wharf and taking a hotel sedan chair up to the Brand House. After a wash-up, he sallied forth to the office of the local Connor agent, a sleek little man of great efficiency, who welcomed the head of the firm with much éclat, though it was just closing time.

"This wholly unworthy person needs your help, great maternal uncle," said Connor in the old stilted phrases of Mandarin.

"All that this humble slave owns is at the disposal of the venerable ancestor!"

"Tell me what you know about the Pavilion of a Thousand Delights. And its occupants."

"It is a viceroy's palace in the higher ground beyond the Nangtai district," said the local manager. "Long vacant, it was occupied several months ago by a foreigner—"

"Prince Pho-to of Annam," said Connor. "Go on."

The sleek eyes blinked. "Exactly. With him are Annamese servants and twenty wives; but there is talk that his creditors are many and he has been selling jewels. Also, the French have spies watching him, although his own servants are faithful. I think he will be sold out by one of the two men with him."

"Eh?" Connor frowned at this, which sounded involved. "Which two men?"

"The white men. One is French, an army deserter. The other is an old Russian, a cripple."

"Which one would sell him out?"

"I do not know. It is only gossip."

"Very well. Now I have important work for you. I wish an interview with this French courtier at my hotel, within the hour if possible; I wish an interview with the Russian at the Pavilion of a Thousand Delights at a later hour this evening. Provide a palanquin for me with bearers who may be trusted implicitly."

"This slave will obey the orders of the great maternal ancestor."

"One thing more. This Prince Pho-to himself—does he speak English or Mandarin?"

"No. He speaks only his own barbarian tongue, and French."

"Good enough."

Connor departed. He had given his agent an almost impossible commission, yet he knew it would be fulfilled.

HE was right. Before he finished dinner, a chit arrived from his agent:

> The first will come soon after this. An interview with the second at nine o'clock. A chair will await you at the door.

With a satisfied nod, Connor finished his dinner, left instructions at the desk regarding a visitor, and went to his room. He had no more than got his pipe well drawing, when a knock came at his door; a short man with wide

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shoulders and bronzed features, a vigorous and direct manner, tailored whites, entered and bowed.

"M'sieu' Connor? Allow me."

From the pasteboard extended, Connor found that he was dealing with one M. Raymond Delille, formerly *avocat* at the Court of Appeals, Toulouse. In a flash he had a glimmer of the man's past; a lawyer, perhaps involved in some disgrace, enlisting in the Colonial forces, later on deserting, to guide the destinies of this rebelling prince and share his fortune, literally enough. Connor smiled, waved his visitor to a chair and a drink.

"Do you speak English, M. Delille—no? Then pray pardon my hesitant French. As you may be aware, it is the habit of Americans to come bluntly to the point, so let us do it. I believe you are acquainted with Colonel Moutet?"

The eyes of Delille hardened, though not before a flicker of apprehension darted in them.

"I know of him at least, *m'sieu'*," he replied cautiously.

"You know that he is here in Fuchow?"

"No! Impossible!" The startled surprise was genuine beyond any question. Connor smiled and took a cigarette from his jade-and-gold case.

"Come, M. Delille; we are not children, you and I. You occupy a certain position with the prince, eh? Never mind what position I occupy; I asked you to come here in order to tell you about Moutet, and to ask you a certain question."

From his pocket, Connor took the sheaf of Bank of England notes and carelessly riffled them in his fingers. They fascinated the widening gaze of the Frenchman.

"Understand me," went on Connor easily. "I am in no way acting contrary to Colonel Moutet or his desires. He is in absolute ignorance of my business, as I am of his; but I suspect that he will make you certain propositions. Well and good. Here in my hand is fifty thousand dollars, gold, in cash. In the event that Moutet made you an offer, and you had this money to cast into the scales with it—would you accept?"

Delille looked up, his eyes dilating.

"An offer—"

"To betray Prince Pho-to, if we put it bluntly."

Delille grimaced. "*Diantre!* Blunt you certainly are. Well, *m'sieu'*, I am not a fool. Do I understand that you offer me this money, here and now?"

Connor laughed. "By no means. Moutet will probably communicate with you to-night or in the morning. Do not mention me to him. If, as I believe, his plans are in entire agreement with my own, I shall turn over the money to you—half in advance, half upon consummation of the work. This, I believe, is satisfactory?"

The other nodded, and drew a deep breath.

"Fifty thousand cash! It is eminently satisfactory, my dear American! I'll communicate with you after Moutet sees me, eh? Good."

"But no mention of me, mind!" warned Connor, and the other promised volubly.

"Dirty rat!" muttered Connor as his visitor departed.

On the evidence he had acquired, he no longer doubted that the mission which Moutet had mentioned was to get rid somehow of the menace presented by Prince Pho-to; by abducting him and getting him back to French territory, perhaps by killing him. Connor had heard much about the man on

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his way south, about his integrity, his popularity, his hatred of the despotic French rule which gripped the empire of his fathers.

And Pho-to, so far as Connor could discover, was next to helpless. None of the great powers had interests in Annam, none of them had any reason to help the prince or to protect him. In seizing or killing him, France could violate Chinese soil with impunity, for all China was in anarchy. Connor had begun to feel an acute sympathy for this fugitive.

To such affairs as this, rather than to piling up more wealth in business, Vincent Connor had devoted himself. To this indefinable cause of justice, of aiding the oppressed, he flung his weight of wealth and connections, his personal abilities, his knowledge of China and its people. Not the least of his aids was his own reputation; the last person to be suspected of such things was the coxcomb and dandy, the young spendthrift from college who had inherited the Connor fortunes.

AT nine-fifteen Connor left the hotel, clad in faultless evening clothes which did not betray the little automatic nestling under his armpit. As he came down the steps, a sedan chair was brought forward; he stepped in silently, and the chair sped away, two men trotting before and after the bearers, with torches.

He had a brief and unforgettable vision of Fuchow by night—the far-flung Chinese city across the river glimmering and shimmering with lights, the two bridges sketched against the darkness by their lanterns, the electric lights of the Nangtai section stretching up the hillsides; then he was in darkness, out of the streets, the bearers padding along a hill road.

Of the Pavilion of a Thousand Delights, he could make out little. Gates in a wall were thrown open, they passed through gardens, and came finally to al lighted doorway where waited a brown Annamese servant. Connor stepped out of his chair, a door was opened, and he found himself in a room whose floor was thick with rugs, whose walls were high with bookshelves, in a soft glow of light from half a dozen Chinese lamps.

Waiting for him was the crippled Russian.

Connor found himself returning the bow of a man whose hair was white, whose face was seamed by age and sufferings, whose body was twisted awkwardly as though wrenched askew by giant hands, yet whose evening attire was faultless as his own. The face of the man was remarkable; it was like wood wrought by the adze, so harsh were its angles, and the thin, bloodless lips made an imperceptible line beneath the clipped mustache, but the eyes were piercing, brilliant blue as though lighted by eternal youth.

"I believe you are Mr. Connor?" said the Russian in fluent English. "I am Ivan Serovitch, Comrade Ivan if you like, formerly a prince of the Litovsk House."

The savage irony of the man showed in his acid voice. Connor smiled.

"Prince Ivan, should I say?" he returned, with the warm affability which made men like and trust him. "I do not care particularly for the titles of Soviet democracy, myself."

"Will you be seated?" Serovitch indicated a chair by the table, where a tray of liqueurs was in evidence. "I am ignorant of the nature of your business."

"Oh, it is extremely commercial business, I assure you," said Connor.

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From his pocket he produced the sheaf of bank notes and laid them on the table, and across them faced the keen blue eyes of his host. "There is ten thousand pounds in cash. Will you count it?"

"In cash? Are you mad—or is this some jest?" The Russian seized the sheaf of notes and glanced through them. He replaced them and frowned at his visitor. "Well?"

"They can be yours, if you will. Every one knows your master is practically done for; his money and credit are exhausted, he is friendless; the net is closing upon him. Well, finish it and earn this packet of notes."

A mortal pallor swept into the distorted face of the Russian. He gripped the table edge with both hands, staring at Connor from blazing eyes.

"You mean it?" he whispered.

"There is the money. What better proof?"

Serovitch passed a hand across his brow, relaxed.

"Let me tell you something, Mr. Connor," he said after a moment. "For ten years I have been the tutor and friend of Prince Pho-to; his destiny has been in my hands, his character has upgrown under my eyes. I have gained a deep admiration for his integrity, for his high and noble spirit. Adversity has not shaken nor altered him. He is truly what Confucius was wont to call the superior man."

Connor shrugged with affected cynicism.

"You may write his epitaph, then," he observed. "Come! Your decision?"

The blue eyes flamed at him.

"Mr. Connor, in my younger days I would have answered your insult with a dagger in your vile heart," said the Russian hoarsely. "As it is, I can only tell you to take your filthy money and get out of here before I call the servants to whip you out. Go!"

A LAUGH broke from Connor. He leaned forward, his eyes very warm, and put out his hand.

"You are a rare man, Ivan Serovitch. Give me your hand! I am proud to know you. I came here, a stranger to you and to Delille, and I had to test you both. I knew one of you was a traitor, perhaps both. The hand of France is already closing upon you, and I myself am running too great risks to take any chances. Now let us start afresh. Your hand!"

The Russian stared in slow comprehension.

"So!" he returned. "You—you don't know how close you were to death!"

Their hands met. Then Connor pushed the money across the table.

"Take it, for your master. It cost me nothing; it is a political bribe I snatched from both the givers and the taker. Now it will serve a real purpose."

"Is this another trick?" Serovitch glared, incredulous and suspicious. "Why are you here? For whom are you acting?"

"For myself," said Connor, and briefly sketched his own position. "You see, these things amuse me. Occasionally reward comes, when one meets a man like you, or like Colonel Moutet."

Serovitch started. "Moutet! That devil—you know him?"

"I arrived in Fuchow to-day, with him," said Connor quietly. "He is not a devil, but a man who obeys orders at all costs, right or wrong. He is here upon a mission which revolts his every instinct, yet he will perform it. You can guess what it is. And Delille—"

"Delille!" breathed the Russian.

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"The deserter, the renegade, bound to us by every tie of gratitude—"

"Plays the part of Judas," said Connor. "Listen, my friend! Don't let that man suspect that you know. Leave him to me; rather, we shall meet the treachery together. I'll have more details to-morrow."

The chin of Serovitch sank on his breast.

"I have feared this," he said gloomily. "Assassination, perhaps. They will stop at nothing. In two days I will have an answer from the British. If we can reach Singapore and stay there, he is safe. Gracious God, how I have worked for it! Undoubtedly the French know this, know that the British will give us protection there. This is why Moutet is here, you see? He means to stop us."

"And you really had no money?"

"Not a piastre," said Serovitch. "No credit. The prince has magnificent jewels, but we could not sell them here. This money of yours—"

"Not mine," and Connor smiled. "Yours."

The Russian looked at him for a moment, then came to his feet.

"Come. I want you to meet the prince. I will tell him all these things."

Serovitch led the way to a curtain, pushed it aside, opened a door after knocking, and ushered Connor into a room where a man sat at a desk writing. The man looked up. He was a typical Annamese, small, thin-featured, in European garments. The Russian clicked his heels and saluted.

"M. le Prince," he said in French, "I beg leave to present a friend, M. Connor, an American. He has come to warn me of danger and to lend certain help."

Prince Pho-to shook hands with Connor, spoke a few words in French, then echoed the word "danger" inquiringly. The Russian shrugged.

"He informs me that Colonel Moutet arrived in Fuchow to-day."

The Annamese made a quiet gesture.

"Very well, my friend," he said to Serovitch. "I understand. It is finished; I shall fight no more, but accept my fate. We have no money, no friends, no hope."

Serovitch laid the packet of notes on the desk.

"On the contrary, M. le Prince, here is ten thousand English pounds, and with it the assurance of help. Moutet's presence means that they are desperate, that a refuge will be given us at Singapore. Thanks to M. Connor."

The thin features lifted; the strained, earnest eyes looked into those of Connor for a moment, then the thin brown hand came out and caught at that of Connor.

"Why you should do this for us I do not know or ask. My friend, I cannot express my thanks."

"Confucius said," returned Connor smilingly, "that it is insulting for the superior man to express thanks to a friend. There is a deep meaning in the words, your highness."

The prince smiled.

TOWARD noon of the following day, Delille came again to the Brand House and was brought directly to Connor's room. He was excited, eager, tense.

"I have seen Moutet," he said in a low voice, his eyes very bright. "He offers me full pardon for all offenses and a post in the Bureau des Indigénes."

Connor's brows lifted. "For what?"

Delille came closer, glanced around, breathed soft words.

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"To-night I will send away most of the servants. At nine, Moutet arrives for a meeting with that damned Russian, Serovitch; three other officers come with him, the car waits. With my help, four can do the work. The Russian will be eliminated, the prince will be carried off!"

"And if he resists?" queried Connor. The Frenchman laughed and shrugged.

"So much the worse for him. It does not matter, really. And—the money?"

"To-night," said Connor. "I shall be at the Pavilion myself, and lend a hand."

"Good! So much the better. Ask for me when you come, you comprehend?"

Delille departed in high spirits.

Connor set forth after the siesta hour for the office of his agent. As he was passing the local branch of the Yokohama Specie Bank, he came face to face with Prince Ivan Serovitch, who was just emerging. The face of the Russian lighted up.

"Ah, my friend! I have received news from Singapore—it is arranged! We depart by the boat to-morrow."

"Moutet strikes to-night," said Connor. The other started.

"What? You are certain?"

"Delille expects him at nine."

A grimace passed across the pallid, hard-angled features. "Very well."

"Will you receive suggestions?" asked Connor gently.

"With all my heart!"

"You will be asked to meet Moutet. Agree. Agree to everything. Be ill. Leave all arrangements in the hands of Delille, you comprehend? Moutet arrives at nine; he will be precise. I will arrive ten minutes before the hour, or will send a friend in my name."

"Eh? But we should post guards—"

Connor tapped him on the arm. "Your place is watched. Why attempt to spoil their effort and make them take some other plan? Better to finish the thing and remove future danger."

"You are right," said the Russian slowly. "But the prince—"

Connor chuckled, then spoke rapidly. "Can you do it?" he concluded. The crippled old Russian broke into a laugh, clapped him on the shoulder, then departed, walking with queer, twisted steps.

Going on to the office of his agent, Connor presently secured what he wanted, and then departed for a sight-seeing tour of the river and its teeming life. He was not surprised to see that two French river gunboats were riding at anchor off the foreign concession.

AFTER dining in leisurely fashion, Connor mounted to his own room and there sat down to adopt the spectacles, yellowish tint, and altered features of Mr. Wang—even, with a drop or two of collodion, contriving to give his eyelids an oblique angle. He did not have Mr. Wang's wardrobe at hand, but his agent had supplied white pongee garments which served the purpose very well. At eight thirty Connor surveyed himself in the glass, and was satisfied. Five minutes later he entered the sedan chair which awaited him, and was on his way.

At ten minutes before nine, his sedan chair halted at the same doorway as on the previous night. The Annamese on guard there barred his way, but at the name of Connor, ushered him into the book-walled room. It was empty. Finding himself alone, Connor lighted a cigarette and sank into a chair, only to stiffen and turn his head, listening.

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From this room opened two inner doors: one to the room of the prince, the other to the left. From this second door, Connor caught strange sounds; a pounding of feet, the murmur of hoarse voices, and then a sudden cry. He started erect, and the door flew open to show the twisted figure of Serovitch. In the Russian's hand was a saber that dripped with fresh blood.

"What has happened?" exclaimed Connor, forgetting his rôle. "What has gone wrong?"

Serovitch stepped forward, staring incredulously.

"You!" he exclaimed. "But—but this is marvelous! Except for the voice, I would not have guessed—"

"Ah! I forgot to introduce myself," said Connor. "I am Mr. Wang."

"Come." Serovitch stood aside at the open door, and gestured. Connor stepped forward.

The next room was a large, nearly empty salon. Lying beside a heavy chair was the body of Delille, still clasping a saber in his hand, a great gash in his throat. Serovitch laughed.

"Judas is repaid," he said in a voice of steel. Connor shrugged.

"Just as well, I suppose," he observed. "But there's no time to waste. All is arranged?"

"Everything. Bring Moutet in here."

"With Delille there on the floor? He'd give the alarm instantly."

The Russian stooped, picked up a tattered rug, and flung it out over the dead figure.

"What better?"

"Right. Does your servant speak Chinese?"

"No; but he speaks French fluently. This devil sent off all but the two men."

"No matter. I'll get back in there to receive them. All hangs on that."

Connor returned to the reception room. He was counting heavily on the moment of mental confusion when Moutet recognized Mr. Wang; it would fog that keen brain, cover up the trap which otherwise Moutet might suspect. As he had said, all hinged upon that.

THE entrance door opened, held by the Annamese servant. Into the room stepped Colonel Moutet, three other men behind him—young, eager men, all four of them in mufti, eyes gleaming. To these others, here was adventure, romance, peril, and to them it mattered nothing if the destiny of other men hung upon their action.

Moutet halted dead at sight of his host.

"M. Wang! You here?" he ejaculated in surprise. Mr. Wang bowed and smiled.

"I am delighted to see you again, M. le Colonel! My friend M. Delille is indisposed, and asked me to meet you. He desires to have a word with you. Meantime, his highness the prince would be pleased to receive your friends, while they await us. I will announce them."

He went to the door of the prince's study, knocked, and opened it to see the figure at the desk. Over his shoulder, a glance showed him Moutet, tensed at this opportunity, speaking rapidly to his three companions. Connor stepped back.

"*Messieurs*, his highness will receive you. There is no ceremony; pray enter. M. le Colonel, will you have the goodness to step this way?"

The three officers observed nothing; Moutet was too much astonished to notice at once the lack of plausibility in this reception. He turned to the

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door of the other room with Mr. Wang, who opened it and closed it again after him.

Standing half hidden by the curtain, Mr. Wang waited a moment. There came a choked voice from the study, a scraping of feet; the three officers reappeared, hastily crossing the room, half carrying, half thrusting, a slender Annamese figure. The entrance door swung open and closed again. They were gone with their prey.

Mr. Wang opened the door at his hand, and passed into the salon.

Colonel Moutet stood there, a man thunderstruck. At one side had appeared Serovitch, silent, sardonic; coming forward toward the Frenchman was Prince Pho-to, smiling slightly. Mr. Wang locked the door, and at the sound Moutet glanced around, perceived everything.

"This is an unexpected pleasure, M. le Colonel," said the grave-eyed Annamese, and Moutet bowed to mask his emotion. "You have come, perhaps, to invite me back to my own country?"

Moutet bit his lip. "I have certain offers to lay before your highness," he said stiffly.

"Perhaps," said Mr. Wang, "you would care to see the late M. Delille?"

With his foot he stirred back the rug, enough to show the dead face of the traitor. At this, Moutet perceived that he was lost. In the uncertain light of the lanterns, his face was white, tense.

"Come!" said the prince quietly. "We know everything, *monsieur*."

Mr. Wang intervened. "Perhaps not everything, your highness." He turned and met the gaze of the Frenchman. "Well, *m'sieu'?* Just how far do your instructions go? You have violated the neutrality of China. Your men have carried off a man whom they too hastily assumed to be the prince. The offense is a grave one. You alone knew the prince by sight, and of course—"

"Trickster!" said Moutet in a stifled voice. "Who are you?"

"I am China," said Mr. Wang calmly, looking Moutet in the eyes. "You must pay for this offense, *monsieur*. You will leave here in a few moments, and for three weeks you will travel upcountry, with very good companions who will see to your comfort and safety."

"You seem very certain that you have beaten me," said Moutet, and his face was like death.

"Careful, *monsieur!*" warned Mr. Wang. "I think I know what is in your mind. You are a gentleman; yet you have your orders. I warn you that what I do not know, I suspect. You hoped to remove Prince Pho-to, if not by one means, then by another. Respect my warning, for I have guarded against everything—"

"Except this!" said Moutet.

And with the word, he whipped out a tiny pistol from his sleeve, firing point-blank at the prince—only to fall sidewise in the very act, as Mr. Wang stooped and jerked the rug from under his feet. Smiling, Mr. Wang looked down at the fallen man.

"You should not telegraph your blows, as they say in America, M. le Colonel."

The prince had disappeared from the room. Moutet looked up at the smiling Mr. Wang, at the acid-eyed Russian; then, with a swift gesture, he seized the fallen pistol and held it to his ear as he pressed the trigger.

This time, he did not miss.

Some weeks after this event, in his

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rooms at the Tientsin Club, Connor was enjoying a pre-dinner drink with a friend from the British legation.

The Briton picked up a magnificent paper-weight from the table, a bit of wondrous old brown Han jade that dated back two thousand years, fashioned into the semblance of a fu-lion. He examined it with appreciation.

"I say, old chap—a marvelous bit of *han yu,* what? Did you pick it up here?"

"A present to me," said Connor, adjusting his dress tie before the mirror. "From a friend of mine named Pho-to."

"Eh, what?" The other glanced suspiciously at him. "Pho-to, eh? I suppose that's some sort of an American joke, what? Photograph and all that. Quite so! You're never serious, are you?"

"No, I'm too busy—playing jokes," and Connor chuckled.

THE END.

The Largest Coins Ever Made

THE weight of their wealth must indeed lie heavily on the natives of the Western Pacific Isle of Yap, who use coins of stone resembling gigantic grindstones. These *feis* are from a foot to twelve feet in diameter, and have a hole in the center through which a beam is placed for carrying. Their value depends both on the diameter and the workmanship, the best shaped and smoothest being most valuable. They must be made of a particularly fine and white limestone found only in the Pelew Islands, over four hundred miles away, and are brought home on crude rafts and canoes. Sometimes a whole expedition will be lost in the frequent, fierce storms.

While we may laugh at these ignorant savages for treasuring their unwieldy coins, economists will tell you that their money is really sounder than ours, for it is based on the actual value of work performed. A score of men must labor for months in making and bringing home a large *fei.*

The largest and finest *fei* ever made was lost overboard in a storm in several hundred feet of water centuries ago, but the family who owned it is accounted one of the richest on the island. The fact that their fine coin is now only a legend makes no difference to the natives; witnesses testified to its value.

Being so heavy, the coins are seldom moved by their new owners when they are earned. The government once ordered the natives to repair the roads, but, being lazy, they ignored this order. It was decided to fine them; but how to do it? Half the population would have been required to collect the fines. At last the governor hit on the expedient of marking the finest *fei* of each family with paint and announced they had been taken as fines. The impoverished, grief-stricken natives at once performed the required road work, and their wealth was returned simply by erasing the marks—after which they were once more prosperous and happy.

E. R. McCarthy.

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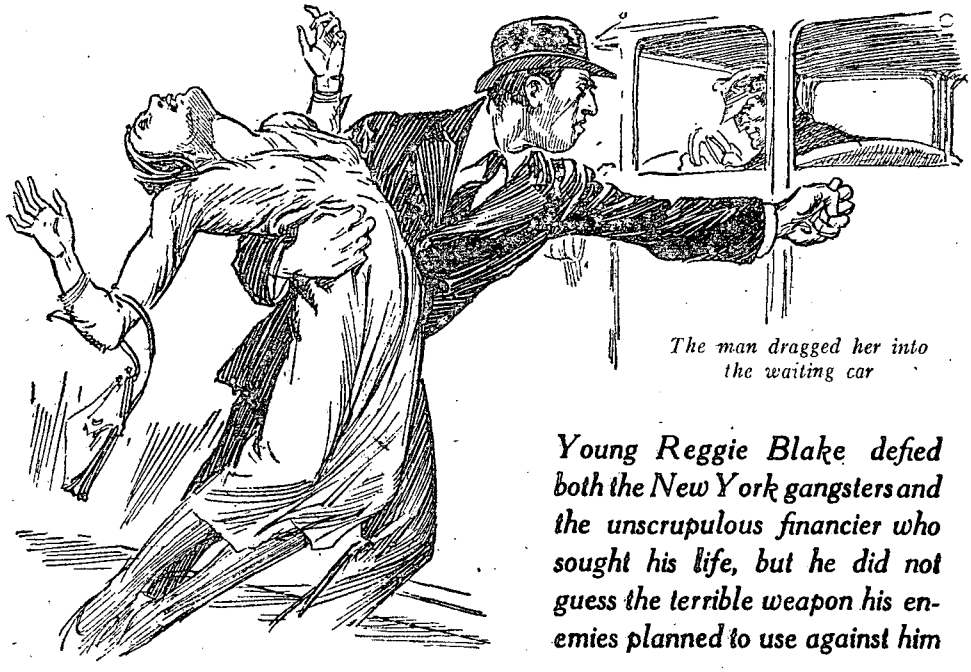
Pirate of Wall Street



The man dragged her into the waiting car

Young Reggie Blake defied both the New York gangsters and the unscrupulous financier who sought his life, but he did not guess the terrible weapon his enemies planned to use against him

By FRED MacISAAC

Author of "The Hothouse World," "Balata," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

ROBBED of his riches and of control of the M. W. and Coast Railroad, Reginald Blake committed suicide. His son, Reggie Blake, although penniless, thereupon devoted his life to humbling T. F. Speaks, the unscrupulous Wall Street financier who had caused the elder Blake's death. One of the first persons Reggie encounters in his search for employment is Ruth, daughter of T. F. Speaks, who had run away from her father several years before.

Reggie and Ruth, who become friends, are both marked for gang vengeance after Art Hornsman, gangster admirer of Ruth, has been killed by his own gun in a struggle with Reggie. Each desiring to get money with which to help the other, Ruth returns to her father, who welcomes her, and Reggie goes to Rita Van Storm, the *fiancée* who had jilted him when it appeared he was to be a pauper, to demand of her the valuable diamond engagement ring he had given her.

Rita, having learned through her father (an associate of Speaks's financial rival, John Grant) of a secret trust fund which Reggie is to receive within a few days, welcomes him warmly, insists that their engagement is still on, and loans him the ring.

The trust fund, of which Reggie is

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ignorant, consists of one thousand shares, the controlling block of M. W. and Coast Railroad stock. A titanic struggle is being waged between Speaks and John Grant for control of the road. Reggie's shares will swing the balance for either man. If Reggie dies before his imminent twenty-fifth birthday when he is to get the stock, it would go to a railroad benefit society which Speaks controls. Speaks commands his lieutenant, Randolph Cook, to do away with Reggie so Speaks can get the stock.

Reggie is kidnaped, tied in a bag and thrown into the river. He escapes, is picked up by a tug, has to fight for his life because of his possession of the diamond engagement ring, and returns to New York to consult with Aristides Lamont, a shrewd old street faker or "pitch man," who is intimately acquainted with Cook's and Speaks's pasts, and who has taken Reggie under his wing. Aristides suspects they had a hand in the kidnaping.

Reggie, after having lunch with Ruth Speaks, finds that he is still pursued by Hornsman's henchmen, and barely escapes from them. Heeding Ruth's plea, he goes to interview Speaks. The latter tries to trick Reggie into parting with his stock. Failing in that, he makes an open threat that Reggie will not live much longer.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE JACKAL PROWLS.

AFTER the departure of Reggie Blake, Aristides Lamont went leisurely about the remainder of his toilet. He changed the white shirt which he had planned to wear, having already worn it only three days, for a clean one and tied around his neck a black silk necktie which flared like that of a Greenwich Village artist. He manicured his nails carefully, a habit formed away back in the Nineties when Aristides used his hands to deal cards.

He drew out of his bag a strip of chamois purloined from a hotel which provided such strips to save towels, and rubbed it over his shoes. He brushed his frock coat carefully and finally placed upon his massive head his big, heavy, black Stetson. He contemplated himself in the mirror and observed with pleasure that his resemblance to Daniel Webster had not dimmed and then threw out his chest and straightened his shoulders and prepared to invade the financial district.

"Mr. Lamont," yelled the landlady. "Gentleman to see you."

"Ah," remarked Aristides aloud. "I feared that the visit of that young man might have consequences."

He opened a bureau drawer and took from it a small bottle, the cork of which he loosened so that it would fall out with a flip of the finger. While Aristides had never used a revolver in his life, he had found that a little bottle of vitriol was handy to have in a tight place.

"Let the gentleman come up," he called.

He heard heavy steps ascending the stairs. He stepped to the door, opened it slowly and as he drew it back, concealed himself behind it. A man entered his room whom Aristides inspected with mingled relief and astonishment. He stepped forth.

"To what do I owe the honor of this visit from the eminent lawyer, Mr. Randolph Cook?" he asked sonorously.

Cook, who was much less florid than usual, smiled upon him ingratiatingly.

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"Aristides Lamont!" he exclaimed. "My old friend. Why shouldn't I come to see you when I learned that you were in town?"

"I can think of several good reasons why you shouldn't," said Aristides. "Now that you are here, however, you are welcome. Take a chair. Take two chairs. Make my humble abode your home. To the great Randolph Cook it must seem a poor place, but it satisfies me."

"It's a dump," said Cook frankly. "Aristides, it is shocking to think that a man of your age and native intelligence has done so poorly by himself."

"Well," said Aristides with a sigh, "during my journey through life I was early forced to discard principles, but I have been horribly handicapped by certain prejudices. How did you know where to find me?"

"From the young man you sent to me with a letter, of course."

"Oh, young Blake. I expressly requested him not to give you my address so I presume it was the first thing he told you."

Cook laughed merrily to cover up the fact that he had lied when he said that Reggie had informed him where Lamont lived.

"Blake tells me that you treated him magnificently," said Lamont. "I had a notion that a letter from me would be efficacious."

"And why not, Aristides? Any friend of yours is a friend of mine."

"If you had been a few minutes earlier you might have encountered our mutual friend," said Lamont, who was watching the lawyer narrowly.

"Eh?" gasped Cook. "You mean he was here, this morning?"

"It seems to surprise you."

"Certainly not. Why should it?"

"No reason. That boy, by the way, is either the greatest romancer since Alexandre Dumas or there are things going on in New York that men like you and I wot not of."

"Still talking like Shakespeare," commented Cook.

"And why not?"

"No reason, no reason. Why do you think he was romancing and what happened to him?"

"Well," said Aristides, "it seems that the lad went to his room about ten last night where he was set upon by Turks who knocked him out, thrust him into a sack, carried him across town in a truck and dumped him into the East River."

"I NEVER heard of such a thing in my life!" exclaimed Cook. "What makes you think they were Turks?"

"Because that is a Turkish method of getting rid of people. Weird tale, isn't it?"

"Ah, very," said Cook. "It seems to me that a man who has been tied in a sack and thrown into the river is apt to drown. Did he tell you how he escaped?"

"Oh, he cut his way out of the sack somehow and swam down the river. He got aboard a barge and eventually returned to New York. Frankly, I doubted the story."

Cook laughed easily. "Sounds rather preposterous, doesn't it? Well, Aristides, I have a lot of things to do down town. I just dropped in for old times' sake and to ask you if there was anything I could do for you."

"Always considerate, Randy, always considerate. You know, there's only one thing which makes me believe that Blake was not romancing. To anybody else but me, the yarn would seem preposterous because there

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are no Turks in America who are practicing the sack trick."

"Certainly not."

"But I happen to know of a man who got rid of a certain woman's husband in St. Louis away back in 1902 by exactly that method. The man was hit on the head with a stuffed club, carried to the river and dropped into a backwater.

"A couple of hours or more later the sack was fished up, the body removed and laid on the pier and a verdict of accidental drowning was brought in."

"And that's exactly what it was," cried Randolph Cook wildly. "And nobody in the world can prove any different."

"Well, the man's wife could have done it, being that she helped you stuff Sam Downs into the sack, and gave you a hand when you pulled it out of the river, but you married her to stop her mouth."

"A wife can't testify against her husband," said Cook. The man was gray as a ghost and shaking as if with ague.

"But she ran away from you a couple of years afterward and you never heard of her again," said Aristides.

"She is dead," said Cook in a low tone.

"Who? Jessie? Randy, she is alive and kicking. I was working a high pitch out in a certain Western State one night when I glanced down and there was Jessie Downs. She's been married a couple of times since, and she's got religion. She is haunted by the ghost of Sam Downs and she told me that she only lived in hopes of finding you some day and forcing you to join with her in the expiation of that horrible crime."

"Did—did you tell her where to find me?"

"Wouldn't think of it," said Aristides cheerfully. "Downs was dead and Jessie had joined the church and you were a reformed character making good in a big way in New York. Besides, Sam Downs was a bad egg who deserved to be put out of the way. I was often tempted myself when he maltreated Jessie. I lacked your audacity, Randolph."

"You're a good fellow, Aristides," said Randolph Cook heartily. "I knew I never had anything to fear from you."

"Of course not," said Aristides, "though you did hire a man to murder me when Jessie told you that she had confessed to me her part in the crime."

"I swear—"

"Oh, you didn't succeed and I believe in letting bygones be bygones."

"ARISTIDES," said Cook eagerly. "I've made a lot of money—"

"Which you have no intention of parting from," said the pitch man. "Randy, for thirty years a sworn statement by me has reposed in a vault in St. Louis, to be opened in case I met a violent end. A few years ago I took it out and placed with it the present name and address of your partner in crime. While I have never appealed to the law during my long and picturesque career, I did not propose to be murdered by any of your agents without a snappy comeback."

"So Jessie is still alive," said Cook mournfully. "It's a strange world, Aristides. You have recalled the most horrible memory of my life. I have made myself over, old friend. You need have no fear of any danger from me. I know that wild horses couldn't tear my secret from you."

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"Certainly not," said Lamont. "What made me think of it was the astonishing similarity between that crime and the yarn told me a little while ago by young Blake. Now I wouldn't be surprised to learn that the sack was dropped in a place in the East River where the water is shallow and where there is no current."

Cook jumped to his feet.

"My God, you don't connect me with the attempt on that boy's life!"

"Well, by a process of elimination, the Turks are exonerated."

"But why on earth—I never saw the boy before you sent him to my office."

Aristides grinned. "Well, you offered to loan him fifty thousand dollars for no reason in the world."

"He was a friend of yours, Aristides."

"Blah. No, Randy, I figured that if you wanted that kid's signature to an agreement to turn over to you his prospects, and if you offered fifty thousand dollars, it meant that his prospects are worth ten times that."

"But he refused my offer. What possible good would it do me to kill him?"

"To be frank, I'm hanged if I know. I'll give you my reasons for suspecting you, Randy. First, you offered him fifty thousand dollars to do something, and he refused. Second, you had no reason in the world for calling on me. That old friendship stuff is hooey, so I think you didn't know when you came in that door whether Reggie was alive or dead and you thought I might have some news of him. And thirdly, the sack into the river is your own patented method of murdering people."

"You are wrong, do you hear? Wrong!" cried the lawyer.

"Let it pass," said Aristides, smiling. "Are you still willing to pay him fifty thousand dollars for that agreement?"

"Yes," said Cook sullenly.

"Well, is there ten thousand dollars in it for me if I persuade him to sign?"

"Yes," said Cook. "I'll pay it out of my own pocket."

"Ah!" exclaimed Aristides. "Then you were not acting for yourself but for my other old friend and confrère, T. F. Speaks."

"I won't answer that question."

"How soon must you have the agreement?"

"Within three or four days." Cook showed his eagerness.

"I'll see what I can do. In the meantime, I'd like to have you remember that I abhor violence and I happen to like young Blake."

"I assure you that I was not responsible for the attempt last night and I have no desire to have him killed."

"Very well. Is there any other business before this meeting?"

"No," said Cook with a deep sigh. "Aristides, I'll pay you ten thousand dollars for that deposition in St. Louis."

The pitch man shook his head. "I'll be able to go on a big enough toot with the ten thousand you are going to pay me for the agreement. Good afternoon, relic of the dear dead days beyond recall."

"Oh, go to the devil," said Randy Cook. "I'm depending on you for that signature."

"Well, that's better than depending on a rope in St. Louis," said Aristides cheerfully.

Without offering to shake hands Cook went out and slammed the door.

"Saved me from a long tedious trip

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down town," remarked Aristides Lamont. "The dirty scoundrel!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

CHLOROFORM.

WHEN Reggie Blake decided that Ruth could not be depended upon to remain safely indoors, he exhibited a knowledge of feminine psychology remarkable in one so young. After leaving her father, he phoned Ruth, told her what had happened to him after putting her in a cab and implored her to keep hidden.

"I went to your father, told him all the facts and asked him to send you to Europe immediately," he added.

"Well, you took too much upon yourself. I'm not going to Europe and leave you here in New York to have terrible things happen to you," she declared vehemently.

"I'll be careful, Ruth. I'm worried more about you than about myself."

"It's you they are after. Oh, Reggie, I'm so scared!"

"Will you do what I ask? Please?"

"Yes. I'll stay in, but I won't go to Europe. Will you phone me regularly and please, please, hide away somewhere yourself?"

"I'll try to. Remember now. Don't poke your nose out till your father makes arrangements for your safety."

"How did you get along with father?" she asked eagerly.

"Not very well. He made me a proposition and I refused it."

"I didn't want you to see him until I had persuaded you to accept," she said mournfully.

"I stand on my own feet, dear. Good-by, and take care of yourself."

"*Au revoir,* Reggie."

Several hours passed tediously in the splendid Speaks apartment. Ruth tried to read. She drummed on the piano. She tried on several new costumes. At five o'clock she decided that there was no possible risk in going next door to the Antibes Beauty Parlor which she knew to be one of the most renowned in New York though she had never before had money enough to patronize a Park Avenue establishment.

Five minutes later she tripped into the Antibes and was greeted by the proprietor in person, who cast one glance at her gown and knew what expensive shop had outfitted her.

He suggested a hair wave, a facial and a manicure and Ruth agreed enthusiastically, so he led her to a chair in a little booth and summoned three attendants to take care of her.

Ruth leaned back luxuriously in her chair and decided that it was a marvelous thing to have a rich father even if he were the Black Devil of Wall Street. Shortly afterward a young woman was placed in a chair directly behind hers in a booth across the narrow corridor. Ruth sized her up in the mirror and decided that she never had seen such a beautiful young woman.

The stranger was a regular customer, for she was cordially greeted by the proprietor and the hairdresser. She was one of the loveliest blondes Ruth had ever looked upon. Her eyes were superb, her features as regular as if carved on a cameo and her figure was the last word in elegance. She made Ruth feel insignificant and rather resentful. Having nothing to do she watched the exquisite society girl. She saw the manicurist settle herself on a stool and take a lovely white hand with long tapering fingers in her own brown hands. And then the manicurist uttered an exclamation.

"Oh, Miss Van Storm," she said.

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"Your beautiful ring. Have you lost it?"

"No," said Rita. "I'm just not wearing it."

"Oh," said the girl, "I thought you might have broken your engagement."

"And why should I do that?"

"I read in the paper that Mr. Blake had lost all his money, and I supposed—"

"You have no business supposing anything," said Rita tartly. "Are you intimating that I broke my engagement because my fiancé had financial reverses?"

"Oh, Miss Van Storm, I didn't mean that."

"I'm having the ring fixed," said Rita. "Besides, Mr. Blake hasn't lost all his money. He is coming into another million."

"I'm so glad," declared the manicurist. "I liked Mr. Reggie better than any gentleman who ever came in here with you."

"I'm glad of that," said Rita. "But if he didn't have a cent I would not break my engagement. People in my class don't do that sort of thing."

"I didn't mean — I beg your pardon—"

"Oh, forget it," said Rita.

She glanced at the mirror and encountered the burning eyes of the young woman in the chair behind her. The girl was pale as death, but she was staring at Rita with such hostility that Miss Van Storm grew pink and angry.

"Pull the curtain, Lulu," she commanded. "After all, one should have some privacy in a place like this."

RUTH submitted numbly to the ministrations of her trio of attendants. She had learned that the beautiful woman behind her was the fiancée of Reggie Blake, and she knew by instinct that the blond creature was cold and hard and arrogant and was certain to break Reggie's heart.

And she was also aware that in comparison with this brilliant society woman she was as a candle competing with an electric bulb. She understood why Reggie loved Rita Van Storm. Any man would. And she thought he still loved her, despite his protestations. And she didn't blame him.

Just the same Rita exuded selfishness from every pore. There was arrogance in the carriage of her head. That kind of girl would break with a man in a second if he lost all his money, and that was exactly what Miss Van Storm had done. She was in character when she did it. Why, then, had she refused to release Reggie from the engagement? Why had she insisted that she loved him and kept him to his pact even when she returned the ring to enable him to sell it to keep alive?

Because he was going to come into another million, that was why. She knew it and Reggie didn't. Of course Reggie might know it, too, but Ruth was confident that he didn't. She understood Reggie thoroughly. There wasn't an atom of deceit in him. He was entirely without guile.

The whole thing was clear to Ruth. That blond woman had broken with him brutally and sent him forth convinced that women were worthless. She had done it because he had gone broke. And, knowing that he had no money, she had been mean enough to keep their engagement ring.

In some way she had learned that he was to inherit a million dollars, and when Reggie was driven by desperation to call and ask her for the ring, she had thrown herself at his head, patched up the engagement and handed

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over the diamond with a grand gesture. Ruth was boiling with anger. Reggie, poor boy, assumed that Rita loved him so much she was willing to share his poverty. Men never have any sense about girls. One glance at Rita told Ruth she wasn't capable of sacrifice.

If this woman had taken him on again, it was certain that Reggie was going to be rich. Even so, he mustn't be permitted to marry the wretch. In some manner Ruth must prevent that.

Only, what chance had she, with her little bag of tricks, against this crafty woman of the world? Not all T. F. Speaks's millions would make Ruth Speaks a tenth as beautiful as Rita Van Storm, and beauty has turned men's heads since time began. Anyway, when Reggie called in the morning she would tell him what she had heard. Heavens, what had she heard? Nothing but a most uplifting statement of fine principles by Rita to her manicurist. Even the statement that Reggie was going to inherit another million might be construed by Reggie as an empty boast to impress the manicurist.

"Finished, *ma'm'selle,*" said the hairdresser.

"Oh, yes," said Ruth absently. "It looks very nice."

She inspected herself without interest, paid her bill, cast a vindictive glance at the curtain behind which the lovely Miss Van Storm was relaxing, and went out of the establishment.

Things occurred then so rapidly that Ruth didn't know what happened. A man appeared beside her, threw an arm about her waist, lifted her and pushed her into a closed motor car, jumped in with her and slammed the door. She opened her mouth to scream and a big hand covered her mouth. The car was moving rapidly through Park Avenue traffic.

Ruth came to and kicked out with her feet while she bit viciously at the hand against her mouth. Somebody swore and a handkerchief saturated with chloroform was pressed against her nose. Oblivion.

CHAPTER XXIV.

REGGIE REFUSES A MILLION DOLLARS.

WHEN Reggie Blake came out of the telephone booth in the lobby of the Salmon Building, there was a tender smile on his lips. He had just finished talking to Ruth and had her promise to remain in her apartment. A hand fell on his arm.

"Reggie, old man," said a voice that he knew. "Where in the world have you been keeping yourself?"

"Hello, Esmond," he replied familiarly. "I've been around."

"This is a piece of luck. Old man Van Storm turned over a commission regarding you this morning and I was wondering where I might get hold of you."

"Here I am," Reggie said, smiling. "I have a notion I know what he wants. I'm broke and engaged to his daughter. He would like to talk turkey to me."

"No, it's a business matter. We're both with Grant & Co., and it's something to do with the firm."

"Really. I'm out of business, as it were."

"No, you're not. You're very much in it. Come up to the office. Van Storm didn't have your address, but he said he expected to find out in a day or two."

They crossed the street and ascended to the seventeenth floor of the Grant Building which was entirely concerned with the affairs of Grant & Co.

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"This way," said young Esmond. He led the way into an office marked sixth vice-president and disclosed Eric Van Storm busy at a desk.

"Ran into Blake in the lobby of the Salmon Building," said Esmond blithely, "and dragged him right over. You hadn't told me what you wanted him for, so I thought you might like to tell him yourself."

"Much obliged," said Van Storm, not too pleasantly. As a matter of fact he was embarrassed because he hadn't decided exactly how to handle the affair after the instructions given him by Rita. "You can go, Esmond. Sit down, Reginald. Glad you and Rita have patched things up."

"In view of my financial condition," said Reggie, smiling, "I rather expected that you would be sorry."

Van Storm smiled professionally. "That girl does as she pleases and makes her poor parents like it. As a matter of fact I have always considered you the finest chap she knew. In regard to your financial condition, I have learned something to-day which makes it brighter than you suppose."

"Well," said Reggie, "it's a long time since I have had any good news."

Van Storm frowned and studied the open-faced young man before him a minute without speaking.

"I'm in a curious situation," he said finally. "Whatever I do, I am, in a sense, disloyal. I am unfair either to you or my firm. But after all, blood is thicker than water and you are going to be my son-in-law. Reginald, I am going to tell you something that will astonish you. Your twenty-fifth birthday occurs shortly, doesn't it?"

"Yes, sir. In two weeks."

"Very well. On your twenty-fifth birthday, the Mammoth Trust Company will turn over to you one thousand shares of M. W. and Coast Railroad securities with accrued dividends for five years which will amount, at the market price, to about one hundred thousand dollars."

"What!" Reggie exclaimed. "I don't understand."

"It was intended by your father as a surprise for you, my boy. Of course he had no notion of the terrible state of affairs which would exist at this time."

"One hundred thousand dollars," murmured Reggie.

"That's the market price. However, the stock, which is quoted at seventy, remains there because there is none of it being traded in. Speaks is supposed to control the road, which causes wise buyers to steer clear of it, while Grant & Co. own all stock not in Speaks's hands and refuse to sell. The fact is that both sides lack five hundred shares of control, and your thousand shares can swing the balance for either side."

"I begin to understand," said Reggie slowly.

"Mr. Grant won't mind paying two hundred thousand for your stock," said Van Storm.

"I don't want to hold him up," said Reggie.

"You have the whip hand, Reginald. In your place I would demand a million."

"But that is a terrible holdup, sir."

"To the contrary. Should Speaks get your stock, it will cost Grant & Co. ten or fifteen millions. And *vice versa.*"

"A million dollars! Mr. Van Storm, when did you learn about this trust which is coming to me? I have a reason for asking."

"This morning," said Van Storm hastily. "Now, Reginald, I'll tell Mr. Grant that you are in the office and you are holding out for a million for your

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stock. He will want to see you personally. Just a minute."

HE left Reggie alone in the office. The latter's head was whirling. A million dollars—and a few days ago he was down to two. Control of his father's railroad, M. W. and Coast, in his hands. He would have sold out for two hundred thousand, but Van Storm had betrayed his employer and planned to have him rook Grant for a million.

That explained Randolph Cook's offer to set him up in business with fifty thousand dollars. That explained Mr. Speaks's anxiety to secure his safety by sending him to Europe with fifty thousand. His inheritance was worth a million, and Speaks, the scoundrel, planned to get it for a twentieth of its value.

Grant kindly offered him a fifth of what it was worth, but Van Storm was looking out for his prospective son-in-law. Did that explain why Rita had discovered that she was willing to share his poverty? No, because Van Storm said he had only learned the facts this morning.

"Come with me," said Van Storm, returning. Reggie rose and followed him in a semi-daze.

Rita's father led him into a splendid office where John Grant sat in state. Grant had often dined at Reggie's home in the days when his father and the great banker had been friends, and Grant rose and greeted him cordially.

"Glad to see you, Reginald," he said heartily. "It's five or six years since we met. You were only a college freshman then."

"How do you do, Mr. Grant," Reggie replied.

"Well, my boy, you've a shrewd head on your shoulders, according to Van Storm, here. Plan to hold us up. Want a million for your stock. You ought to be glad to give it to us to balk your father's enemy, that scoundrel Speaks."

"I'd like to ask you one question, sir."

"Certainly, my boy."

"When did you inform Mr. Van Storm of this situation?"

"Yesterday. Why?"

"Oh, nothing," said Reggie. He knew now why Rita wanted to share his poverty. He was bound hand and foot to the cold-blooded, mercenary female she had shown herself to be right after his father's death.

"I—er—I thought it was this morning. You're right, chief. You did tell me about it yesterday," said Van Storm, much confused.

Grant glanced sharply at him. "You can go, Van Storm," he said curtly. "Sit down, Blake. I'm not going to haggle with you. The thousand shares are worth a million to us."

"Look here, Mr. Grant, why didn't you help my father?" demanded Reggie.

"My boy, I was in Europe. I was taking a cure. I didn't know anything about your father's difficulties. We had a silly misunderstanding some years ago, you know."

"Why are you fighting Speaks for control of the road now?"

"Because it's a crime to let the Blake railroad fall into the hands of a professional wrecker."

"Then your motive is purely altruistic?"

"Not exactly. It's a fine property. We expect to make a good thing out of it."

"Reorganize it, I suppose. Put in your own men?"

"Naturally. It will be a Grant railroad."

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"Why don't you continue my father's people in charge? They are efficient. They made it what it is."

"That isn't our policy. We run our own properties."

"As I understand it, Speaks lacks five hundred shares and so do you."

"Right."

"And you are willing to pay me a million for my thousand shares."

Grant made a grimace. "Not willing. Forced to accept your terms."

Reggie swallowed a lump in his throat.

"I don't care to sell," he said firmly.

"What's that? Man alive, you don't want Speaks to get the road! I refuse to enter a bidding contest with that rascal. I prefer to lose my investment."

"I'm not doing business with Speaks, sir."

"Then what are you going to do?"

Reggie smiled. "Keep it a Blake railroad," he declared. "I control this road. You've got to play with me to keep Speaks out. I don't want the people in office disturbed. I'll keep the old board in office. Maybe they'll give me a job in the law department."

GRANT stared at him in astonishment and admiration. "A chip of the old block," he declared. "You can't get away with it though, Blake. All I have to do is to sell five hundred shares of my holdings and Speaks has you. And *vice versa*."

"But you don't dare!" cried Reggie. "You can't sell everything you've got because nobody would buy it all. If Speaks gets control through purchase of a small block of your securities he can bear the stock until you've lost millions. And he is in the same fix, isn't he?"

"Upon my word," marveled Grant. "You're dead right. If you insist upon holding on, you have us both in a vise. Look here. I'll make you president of the road and keep the old men in office if you'll take a million for your stock."

"I'm not selling," said Reggie.

"But why? I'm giving you everything you ask."

"You might chuck us out at the next election."

"Don't you see it's ridiculous to expect to control two hundred thousand shares with one thousand indefinitely? Speaks and I are at outs now, but in a year we might get together."

"I'll take a chance. I'll tell you what I will do, sir. I'll make a will by which you can buy the stock from my estate for a million, so you run no risks if anything happens to me."

"The will won't be any good, my boy. You see, your father, who at the time was a very wealthy man, had provided that if you die before you are twenty-five the securities go to the railroad Benefit Society and Speaks controls the Benefit Society."

"Then you'll just have to take a chance on me," said Reggie. "I positively am not going to sell this stock."

"If you change your mind before the meeting of the board of directors, which takes place in three weeks, my offer still stands," said Grant.

"I take it you will support me at the meeting, sir?"

"Damn it, I've got to," said Grant, with a grimace. "My only consolation is that we'll lick Speaks together."

"Then I'll be saying good day, sir."

Grant shook his hand.

"You've a lot of your father in you," he said. "Lots of backbone and some folly."

Reggie smiled and took his leave.

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Of course he was a fool to refuse a million. He knew that. He knew that he wouldn't be able to whipsaw two men like Grant and Speaks for any length of time. Eventually they would job him and he would be thrown out of control of the road without a penny. Then Rita Van Storm would have her chance to share poverty with the man she claimed to love.

Eric Van Storm was waiting for him outside. There was a broad smile on his face and a greeter's hand outstretched.

"Congratulations, my boy," he said heartily. "And don't forget that you owe your million to my tip."

Reggie eyed him disdainfully. "I am not selling," he said. "I have refused the million. I am still broke and likely to remain so, as I can't sell my stock without playing into the hands of you or your opponent."

"But—but—you must be mad."

"I'm probably a little crazy. Give my regards to Rita."

"Come to dinner to-night. Let her talk to you."

"Oh, Rita doesn't care what I do," replied Reggie. "She loves me so much she would rather share a garret with me than a palace with any other man."

With that parting shot he left the offices of Grant & Co.

CHAPTER XXV.

FLIGHT.

THERE was a small crowd on the corner of Lexington Avenue and East Eighty-sixth Street as Reggie came out of the subway about eight that night. He had dined down town and come up on the East Side subway, thinking it less likely to be frequented by members of the Hornsman gang than the West Side, and he proposed to slip into his hotel and go to bed early.

He was suffering from a reaction after his generous gesture in the office of John Grant. A man can't throw away a cool million and not regret it, and Reggie, who had known what it was to be penniless for some time now, was fully alive to the benefits to be derived from the fortune he had refused.

Although he had never been associated in business with his father, he was aware that the staff of the M. W. and Coast Railroad had been intensely loyal to the Blake interests and that the management was the most efficient of any small railroad in the United States. Grant would have thrown these people out as ruthlessly as Speaks would have done if a Blake had not arisen to protect them.

But, as Grant had agreed to his ultimatum, as the personnel of the road would have been kept in office if he had sold his stock, why had he taken the quixotic road?

Because he was quivering with loathing at the revelation of the perfidy of Rita Van Storm. Her father had lied when he said he learned about the unexpected inheritance that morning. Grant had forced him to admit that he had been told of it the day before. Van Storm had told Rita, and that explained the superb emotional scene she had put on and her willingness to marry a pauper.

If Reggie Blake had accepted that million Rita would have clung to him like a leech. He would have had to marry and live with a woman he despised. Poverty was bad, but being the husband of the girl Rita had shown herself to be would be worse. He had done the proper thing. He was glad

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he had done it. Yet if it hadn't been for the cursed engagement—

Why had he gone back to Van Storm's last night? The proceeds of the ring were still in his pocket. If the ring were still on Rita's finger, he could have closed the deal with John Grant to-day with a clear conscience and, as a millionaire, have taken Ruth from the malign influence of T. F. Speaks.

He felt sure that Ruth loved him and he knew she didn't love her father. Speaks might protest all he liked, but Ruth would pack up and follow the man she loved.

"So remarkable is the steel in the blade of this wonder knife," said a rich, resonant and familiar voice, "that it will not only whittle a stick of hard wood but, like a razor blade, will cut a thin sheet of paper, as I am about to demonstrate. This steel is produced by a patented process from iron ore found only in one small deposit in the Ural Mountains which, as every schoolboy knows, are the boundary between Europe and Asia. Under Bolshevik anarchy, the mine has shut down and when the small stock of paring knives in my possession is exhausted—"

Reggie grinned and pushed his way through the crowd. Behind his pitch table stood Aristides Lamont, doing a rushing business in common kitchen knives to be procured in any store at a dime each.

As Reggie gazed he saw the pitch man performing the miracle of whittling hard wood and then cutting tissue paper. Aware that there was a trick of some kind, Reggie watched closely and observed that Aristides whittled with the upper part of the blade and cut the paper with the lower part, where the keen edge had not been blunted by contact with the wagon spoke he was using for demonstration purposes.

"Marvelous!" Blake exclaimed. "Give me one, please."

"With pleasure, sir," said Aristides, whose visage betrayed no sign of recognition. "Twenty-five cents, and it's worth five dollars if it's worth a nickel."

A score of knives changed ownership, and then Aristides closed his pitch, made a sign to Reggie to follow him, and moved rapidly away. Blake caught up with him at the next corner.

"I CONSIDER this providential," said Aristides. "I have important news for you, important as life or death, and I had no notion where to find you. Your landlady said you had moved out without notice. I shifted to the East Side to avoid the Hornsman neighborhood, and you pop up as if sent by Heaven."

"I've a tale to tell you that will make your eyes stick out," replied Reggie. "I've taken a room in a hotel near here. Come with me and we'll swap stories."

In Reggie's room Aristides eased himself out of his coat and vest, kicked off his boots, and threw himself on the bed.

"To begin," said Reggie, "I have discovered why Mr. Cook wanted to buy my prospects for fifty thousand dollars."

"And I have discovered who tossed you into the river last night," said Lamont. "Proceed."

"I had better begin at the beginning," said Reggie, "and tell you all the events of the day. In the first place, my friend, Miss Stickney, whom you liked and wanted to initiate into the

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pitch business, turns out to be the daughter of T. F. Speaks himself."

Aristides sat up in bed, snorted, and dropped back again.

"She would be a great success in my business," he said dryly, "if she has inherited her father's talents."

Reggie smiled and related what had happened at the Royale.

"You were a fool," said Aristides. "And you didn't throw them off the track of the young woman. Those two men alighted from the second cab. The first swung round the corner and followed Miss Speaks home. Go on."

"Eh? Do you think so?"

"Have no doubt of it."

"Well, it demonstrates I was right in going to Mr. Speaks and asking him to send Ruth away, to Europe or somewhere."

"You saw Speaks?"

"Yes, and he offered me fifty thousand on the same terms Cook had made, which proved that Cook's offer came from him originally."

"Correct. Go on."

"And then something happened which revealed their motive." He told of meeting the clerk, Esmond, and going to Grant & Co., and related his conversation with John Grant.

Aristides was off the bed and pacing the room when he finished.

"So you plan to play those two against each other and operate the M. W. and Coast Railroad?"

"And I can do it, too," said Reggie. "I have them in a vise. Grant said so."

"Young man," said Aristides solemnly, "you are not going to swing that railroad meeting as you plan. Shall I tell you why?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Because you will be a dead man before your twenty-fifth birthday."

Reggie turned pale. "I—I don't understand."

"And it isn't Hornsman's gang you have to fear most," continued the pitch man. "Now I understand everything. First I'll tell you who tried to kill you last night. Randy Cook's hirelings."

"Ridiculous. Don't you see—"

"I see everything. It's all plain now. In two weeks you will be given one thousand shares of stock which you have agreed to operate with Grant & Co. That means that Speaks will be thrown out of the railroad meeting and Grant will see that his stock isn't worth the paper it is engraved on."

"No, he won't. He has to continue the present management."

"Anyway, Speaks loses control. All right. If you die before your twenty-fifth birthday, your stock goes to the Railroad Benefit Society which Speaks controls. He sells it to himself and takes over the road. If you had agreed to accept fifty thousand dollars, you would be safe from Speaks; but you refused, and it is open season on Reggie Blake.

"The first blow was struck last night. Like you, I couldn't understand what good it would do Cook to kill you, when you had not signed the agreement he offered you. Now I know. Speaks would have saved fifty thousand dollars, because he will manipulate that stock so that it won't cost him a cent."

"That's a terrible charge to bring against any man, Mr. Lamont," said Reggie gravely.

"My young friend, I know whereof I speak. I suspected from the method used that Randy was responsible. A remarkable thing about murderers is that they have one favorite method. It wasn't the first time that Cook

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thrust a man into a sack and threw him into a river. The sack would have been fished out by his men, later; your body would be removed, and found in the water by some innocent party. Your death would have been judged to be accidental drowning."

Reggie drew out his handkerchief and wiped beads of sweat from his brow.

The pitch man was deadly serious and entirely convincing.

"THEY have two weeks in which to eliminate you," Aristides added encouragingly. "Have you still got that two thousand dollars?"

"Yes."

"Well, I have nearly a thousand. New York is no place for you and me, Reginald. We're starting for parts unknown to-night."

"But I can't."

"Why can't you?"

"Ruth."

"The tiger can take care of his cub now that you have warned him. Have you any other reason?'

"No-o."

"You have to avoid those hyenas for two weeks. On your twenty-fifth birthday the stock becomes your property, and you'll sell it for a million to John Grant. The Benefit Society only inherits it if you die within the next two weeks. My boy, it is fortunate for you that you have won the friendship of Aristides Lamont. Even so, I would not insure your life for ninety-nine per cent. Speaks has spies in Grant's office, no doubt. He already knows that you have made a deal with Grant. This time he won't depend entirely on Randy Cook. The Devil will go on the warpath in person."

"A great corporation lawyer and an enormously wealthy banker? Surely they wouldn't risk all they have—"

"They have money enough to buy a thousand murderers, Reginald. And I may add, my own life isn't worth a nickel in view of what you have revealed to me. If they kill you, they must eliminate me, because I charged Cook to his face to-day with the attempt on you last night."

"You saw him?"

Lamont grinned. "The damned rattlesnake called on me. Said he wanted to renew old friendships; but what he was after was to learn what had become of you. You should have seen his face when I told him you had just left."

"All right," said Reggie. "Where shall we go?"

"Canada. The long arm of American gang vengeance would not reach us in Canada."

"I'll pack—"

"Pack nothing. I shall abandon my effects. We'll walk out of here, take the subway to Grand Central, wait until we see a northbound train on the point of departure, and make a last minute rush for it without even buying tickets. You are in dire peril, and I'm in considerable danger myself."

"Well, I'm going to call up Ruth to say good-by."

"It's risky."

"I'm doing it anyway," said Reggie stubbornly.

Lamont shrugged his big shoulders. "Very well. We shall be away before they can trace the call."

REGINALD picked up the phone and called the number of T. F. Speaks's apartment. "May I speak to Miss Speaks?" he asked the servant who answered.

"Just a minute, sir."

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"Who wants Miss Speaks?" demanded a harsh voice a second later.

"This is Reginald Blake, Mr. Speaks."

"Then where is my daughter, you damned whelp?"

"Is—isn't she there?"

"She went to the hairdresser's at five o'clock and has not returned. I thought you might have disobeyed my order and made an engagement with her."

"I haven't seen Ruth since I left her after lunch, Mr. Speaks. Do you realize what this means?"

"They traced her, eh?"

"It looks like it."

"Where are you?"

"In my room in the Evans Hotel."

"I'll be there in ten minutes." Speaks hung up with a bang.

"I take it the girl has disappeared," said Aristides.

"They trailed her. I pleaded with her to stay in," groaned Reggie.

"It's the Hornsman gang, of course."

Reggie nodded. He was suffering intensely.

"Let Speaks deal with the Hornsman gang," said the pitch man.

"Look here, Aristides. I love that girl," exclaimed Reggie. "I've got to find her."

"Don't you see that's what they want?" demanded Lamont. "They know she didn't kill Hornsman. They are after you. They expect you to rush out in search of her and they'll fill you full of lead."

"I don't care a damn. I'm going after her."

"And where are you going?"

"I—I don't know."

"Exactly. Let's get out of here. We don't want Speaks upon us."

"But he's her father."

"My boy! I've known that copperhead for thirty years. He'll look for his daughter with one hand, and knife you in the back with the other. You come with me."

"No."

"I'd rather face the Hornsman gang with guns in their hands than spend five minutes in the company of T. F. Speaks when I know I'm in his way. You come with me."

"I can't, I tell you."

"That's too bad," said Aristides, moving toward the door. "Because I happen to know the headquarters of the Hornsman outfit."

"You do? Will you take me there?"

Aristides hesitated a moment. "Well, after all, I have lived a long and rather entertaining life. Yes, I'll go with you and try to help find a young woman I have seen only once in my life and who wouldn't wipe her feet on me. Scratch a line to Speaks that you are out looking for his daughter, and hurry."

Reggie grasped pen and paper and did as he was told.

"We'll leave it for him with the clerk," said the pitch man. "Come on."

CHAPTER XXVI.

AN EXECUTION.

"WHAT makes you think this girl is Speaks's daughter?" demanded the pitch man as they walked hastily up Lexington Avenue.

"She says so and Speaks admits it. What more do you want?"

"During my long acquaintance with him I was never aware that he had been married. Are you quite certain that her alleged disappearance isn't a scheme of T. F.'s to get his claws on you?"

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"After what transpired this afternoon I'm sure Ruth has been kidnaped."

"Well, I pride myself upon reading character at a glance. The girl, at least, is honest. Does Speaks know that the Hornsman gang is after you?"

"Of course. I had to explain why Ruth was in danger."

"Do you realize that they would be doing him a tremendous favor by putting a bullet in your heart? The girl may be in her room. He may have handed you this tale of her disappearance on purpose to send you charging into the ranks of these professional murderers."

"My dear Aristides," said Reggie impatiently, "the man, no doubt, is an unprincipled scoundrel, but he isn't a fiend incarnate. His treatment of Ruth proves that he has human feelings."

"Reginald, T. F. Speaks comes nearer to being the Devil, in person, than any individual I have encountered in my long and checkered career. I was associated with him for a brief period in business. He trimmed me and tried to frame me for murder. For twenty years I have been crossing his trail and it was always as gory as that left by a band of wild Indians. If this girl is his daughter, he might treat her kindly so long as she obeyed his orders, but he wouldn't hesitate to use her in any manner which appeared to him to be to his advantage. There is bad blood in that girl."

"One more word from you and I'll forget your age and smash your nose," said Reggie furiously. "He treated her mother shamefully, allowed the child to go to an orphan asylum after her mother's death, then turned up a dozen years later to take her with him. She defied him and escaped from the asylum. She only went to him the other day as a refuge from the police. Ruth is true blue. Now let's find her."

"First we are going to make sure that she isn't safe at home. Speaks is on his way to your hotel, with what intentions I don't know. We'll call at his apartment."

"We're wasting time, I tell you," roared the exasperated young man.

"We have plenty of time. I know where to find the Hornsman mob and you don't, so you'll follow me."

He called a taxi and demanded Ruth's address of Reggie. Blake gave it sullenly.

"You have no weapon, I suppose," said Lamont when they were seated in the taxi.

"No. Of course not."

"I never carry firearms myself. And guns wouldn't help us in this expedition. If we win it will be by finesse. Do you know the number of Speaks's apartment?"

"No."

"It doesn't matter. We'll find it."

They descended from the taxi before the superb apartment building in which the financier and his daughter resided. Reggie followed the pitch man into the building and into an elevator.

"T. F. Speaks," Lamont said.

"Yes, sir."

The operator stopped his car in a couple of seconds.

"By George, I've forgotten the number," said Aristides.

"Apartment D, sir."

"Ah, yes, of course."

LAMONT led the way to Apartment D. Outside the door he paused to instruct Reggie. "I'll handle the butler. You push into the apartment and yell 'Ruth' at the top of your lungs. If she is there she will answer you."

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"And if she isn't, the butler will have us arrested," said Reggie.

"Leave him to me," said Lamont. He pressed the button.

A second afterwards the door opened.

"Headquarters men," said Lamont. "We want to talk to Miss Ruth Speaks."

"But she is not here, sir. She has disappeared," said the agitated servant.

"Make sure of that, Jones," said Lamont importantly. "Stand aside, fellow."

Reggie pushed into the living room, stood in the middle of the floor and shouted at the top of his lungs.

"Oh, Ruth! Ruth! Ruth Speaks!"

No answer. He waited a second.

"Might as well go through the apartment," said Lamont from the door.

Reggie needed no more urging. He ran up to the second floor of the duplex, looked into all the bedrooms and returned.

"Not here," he said.

"Which is exactly what I told you!" cried the indignant butler. "Mr. Speaks will have something to say to your chief for your rudeness, gentlemen."

"Tell him to go as far as he likes," replied Aristides. "My name is Smith and this is Mr. Jones. Come on, Jones."

"I hope you're satisfied," said Reggie as they waited for the elevator. "We've lost half an hour through your folly."

"Not lost, my boy. We know now that this wasn't a trap set by T. F. Speaks. The headquarters of the Hornsman outfit is a speakeasy in the West Eighties where the prospects of our losing our valuable lives are most excellent."

"How do you know?"

"Because I was told to report there if I ran across you again and could supply them your name and address."

"And how is supplying them my name and address going to help us to find Ruth?"

"DOWN," said Aristides to the elevator man. "I don't think it would help us in the least, Reginald, and I have no intention of informing them. Let us now take a taxi across town.

"As I diagnose the situation," said the pitch man, as they climbed into a taxi, "the late Mr. Hornsman's friends, who are more loyal to his memory than most gangsters, deduced by the disappearance of Ruth from her boarding place that she knew the details of the death of their revered leader. Well, she was seen by one of them earlier in the evening of the murder in conference with you and me.

"Your personal appearance probably made but a slight impression upon the rascal who happened to observe us, but a man of my type, once seen, is always remembered. While the police jumped to the conclusion that Hornsman was bumped off by a rival gangster his followers knew better. The fact that Hornsman was at Ruth's door alone and unattended indicates that there was a truce among the thugs of the underworld at the moment—"

"Why go into all that?" asked Reggie impatiently.

"Because it is the only way to give us a ray of light. As I said, they jumped to the conclusion that the young man in the company of the girl who they considered belonged to Hornsman, had slain their chief. If Ruth had not flitted in the early morn-

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ing, they would have pounced upon her and forced from her your identity. Failing that, they made a search for me and located me at one of my places of business.

"I told them that I picked you up on a park bench and didn't know what had become of you, but, apparently, they set a watch on me and you were followed to-day from my residence to your own and afterward to the Royale where you met Miss Speaks. Up to this time they were not certain that you were the man they wanted, but when they had identified Miss Speaks as Ruth Stickney they became convinced of it. Hence the attempt on your life."

"We know all that."

Aristides lifted a rebuking hand. "Be silent, young man. They fired at you and missed. You escaped. You were now on your guard and New York is vast and reasonably good for concealment. But you were obviously infatuated with the girl and they had trailed her to the Speaks apartment. They captured her and are patiently waiting until you put in an appearance in search of her. They gave me an address at which to report your whereabouts. They are hopeful that I shall pass it on to you. So, about one second after you step inside the door of that speakeasy, you will be a b l e e d i n g corpse. What the devil—"

The driver of their taxi had suddenly applied his brakes, for a car ahead had stopped without warning. A man leaped out of it and ran toward the taxi containing Lamont and Blake, swearing furiously at their chauffeur, whose bumper had crashed into that of the blockading car. He had a gun in his hand.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.

Novel Use for Telephones

THE telephone is a novel toy to the young people of the Philippines who come to Manila to work or study. And although telephone service is usually free in shops and cafés, many proprietors have been obliged to make a charge—or their lines would be constantly "beezy," as native operators say.

Siesta time in the great Oriental seaport of Manila is from twelve to two, and during that period the natives usually sleep. Recently an American conducting an advertising concern found that he was losing the business of many of his countrymen, because they called him up during the siesta period and received no answer.

Accordingly he hired a young Filipino to attend the phone, and lingered long at lunch. But then he was bombarded with complaints that his line was "beezy." He resolved to investigate, and one day at half past twelve he returned to his office. There sat the Filipino with the transmitter off the hook, strumming a guitar and singing to his sweetheart at the other end of the line.

During the recent telephone strike of subscribers in Havana, those who continued to keep their instruments placarded them with notices. Some read: "This phone is for the transaction of business—not love affairs," others: "Go and tell her all about it," and a few still more cryptic: "Say it and go."

C. A. Freeman.

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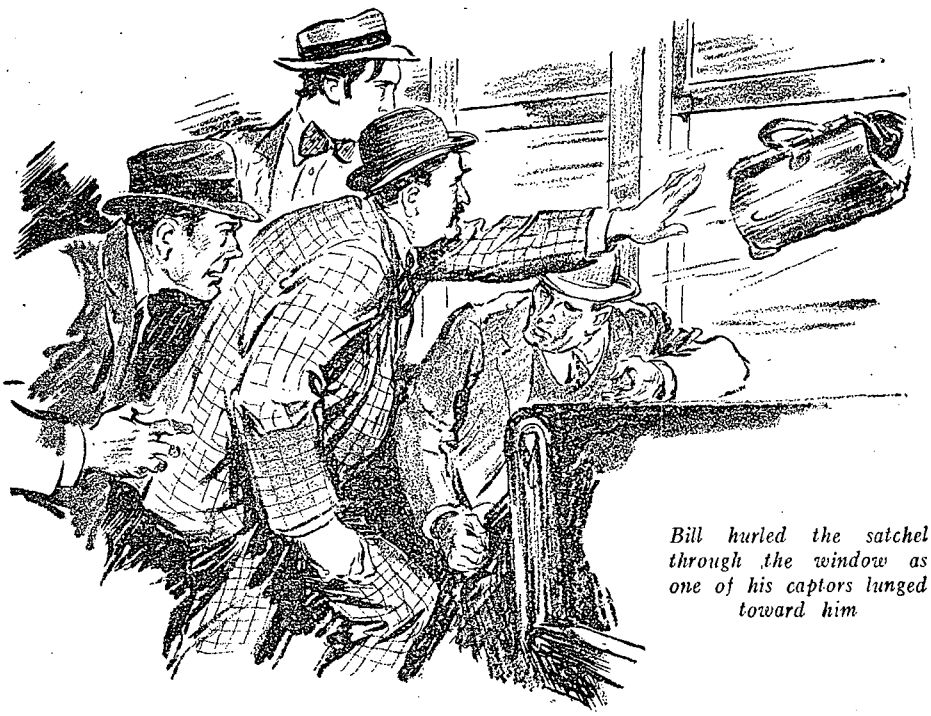

Bill hurled the satchel through the window as one of his captors lunged toward him

In Stone Shade

When drifters Jim and Bill took seats in front of the toughest-looking eggs in the day coach they thought they were going for a ride, but they soon decided they were being taken for one

By JOHN H. THOMPSON

BILL'S appetite ordinarily has first place in his affections, but his feet were sore and it was a clear case of alienation of affections for Miss Appetite.

"It's eat or ride, and I cast one big vote to ride," groaned Bill as he eased himself down on the depot bench and ruefully surveyed his aching dogs.

I glanced through the open doorway to the shabby front of a quick-lunch restaurant across the square. It was five hundred feet away, but I could detect the soulful odor of frying onions. I sniffed h u n g r i l y and almost wished that Bill had wooden legs; but after all a pal's a pal, and aching dogs are aching dogs.

"We'll ride, old man," I conceded.

Bill sighed in relief, dug his hand into his pocket, and pulled up the slim store of loose change.

"Toddle over to the box office and buy two tickets for the nearest burg in any direction," he s u g g e s t e d. "There might be enough left for a cup of coffee for you. I'm hungry, too, but if I had to walk all the way across that square to the restaurant they'd have to call the ambulance to lug me back to

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the station again for the train. As between two aching feet and one aching stomach, the feet win by a vote of two to one."

Inquiry at the ticket office disclosed that we were just halfway between Thomaston to the south and Winsted to the north. Winsted, though, was the place where they stabled the locomotive for the night, while beyond Thomaston to the south stretched a land of glorious opportunity dotted with small cities where a satchelful of Higgins Peerless Indian Oil might be translated into that language which all restaurant proprietors understand.

Two tickets to Thomaston, however, left only three cents in the treasury, not even enough for one cup of coffee. We would have preferred to keep on to Waterbury rather than to take a chance on another small town like Thomaston; but, as the bald-headed barber remarked when he wrapped up another bottle of sure-fire hair tonic for a cash customer: "There's always a chance that something surprising may happen."

THERE was only a handful of passengers in our car. We sat down in front of a pair of tough-looking birds who apparently had come from somewhere up the line. I didn't like their looks. They were the kind of birds that I would have preferred to sit behind instead of in front of if we had been riding in the dark.

We tucked our tickets in their places and I prepared to enjoy the passing scenery, but the train had no sooner started than Bill was seized with the happy idea that it might feel good to stand out in the vestibule and let the draft blow on his feet. We were standing there when the conductor came through.

"Tickets?" He eyed us a bit suspiciously. A pair of old drifters like Bill and me don't look like a pair of wealthy aldermen heading southward for a sojourn at high-priced resorts.

"Tucked back there in our seats in front of those two hard-looking guys," said Bill, jerking his thumb toward the interior of the car. "We left them there, and a satchel on the seat, and if they're gone we'll know who to search," he added grimly.

The conductor frowned and continued on his way, but, inasmuch as he didn't return, we knew that he must have found the tickets.

Through the vestibule windows we began to catch fleeting glimpses of clusters of houses.

"Look!" Bill had glanced into the car. The two tough-looking birds had arisen and were hustling out of the other end of the car. "I bet they've swiped our satchel. I wouldn't trust those two babies out of my sight. I bet they'd steal the plush off the seats if it wasn't glued on."

I hurried back to our seat. The satchel was there just as we had left it. The conductor, though, had not taken our tickets. Probably this was one of those lines where one buys a ticket to get on the train and hands it over to get off.

The train was slowing down for a town, so I grabbed the tickets and the satchel and rejoined Bill.

"Thomaston!" shouted the brakeman from somewhere up ahead.

"And here's hoping that Thomaston people are so badly knotted up with rheumatism that they will grab the chance to sink their hard-earned dollars in such a good, all around household remedy, spot eliminator and bug exterminator as Higgins Peerless Indian Oil," sighed Bill hopefully as he

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stooped over and loosened a shoe lace. "All we want is enough for two feeds and two fares to Waterbury—and a place to rest our feet," he added.

The train rattled to a stop. The conductor opened the vestibule doors at the other end of the car, and the two tough-looking birds quickly disappeared from view.

"AREN'T they going to open the doors at this end of the car?" grumbled Bill. "Sore feet are entitled to as much consideration as tough faces."

The conductor, watch in hand, was out on the station platform.

Bill rapped sharply on the glass.

"Hey, what's the big idea?" he sputtered. "Do we have to jimmy our way out in order to get off this train?"

"This is Thomaston," called the conductor.

"Who said it wasn't?" fumed Bill.

The conductor eyed him with mild surprise and then rudely turned his back.

"I'm going to report this to the Governor, to the Public Utilities Commission, to the Interstate Commerce Commission, to the—" Bill paused in his search for more official heads to bowl at the conductor.

I happened to glance at the tickets in my hand.

"Winsted to Waterbury," they read. I looked again. There was no mistaking it.

"Look at that, Bill!" I exclaimed. "We've got tickets for Waterbury. They were good only to Thomaston when I bought them. I'm certain of that."

"All aboard," shouted the conductor outside. The train began to move.

"Well, we won't tempt Providence, that's sure," said Bill. "We'll go on to Waterbury. That's where we wanted to go, anyhow."

"Those two birds who sat back of us must have swapped tickets for some reason or other," I ventured. "I can't understand it."

"Maybe they weren't so tough as we thought they were," said Bill charitably. "Maybe they left a box of lunch for us, too."

He hobbled back into the car and hopefully searched in both seats. That is the trouble with Bill—never satisfied.

The train made frequent stops. At one of these, two big guys with black derbies boarded the train and strolled into our car. They seemed to be looking for somebody. Reaching our seat, they stopped abruptly.

"These your tickets?" demanded the bigger of the two.

He indicated the pasteboards tucked in front of us.

Bill and I tried not to look guilty.

"Of course they are," said Bill.

"Winsted to Waterbury?"

"You can read, can't you?" countered Bill with dignity.

"We got 'em, Joe." The big fellow turned gleefully to his companion.

"Got what?" inquired Bill coldly.

"You two crooks," said the big fellow, with equal coolness.

"Nobody's going to call us crooks and get away with it," snorted Bill indignantly. "If my feet weren't so goldinged sore, I'd kick the two of you over. These are our tickets. We didn't steal 'em."

"Nobody said you stole the tickets," retorted the big fellow. "You bought 'em, but I guess you stole everything else you got."

He had reached his hand into his pocket and pulled out a pair of handcuffs.

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He turned to his companion.

"No question about it. These are the two," he said. "The constable was positive there were no other Winsted-Waterbury passengers on this train."

Bill was struggling protestingly to his aching feet.

"KEEP quiet, Decker," snapped the big fellow, eying Bill sternly. "There's a five thousand dollar reward for the capture of you and your pal here"—he jerked his thumb toward me—"dead or alive; and it won't make a whole lot of difference to me whether I take you two from the station to headquarters in a hearse or in a patrol car. You may take your choice."

Bill didn't lose any time choosing. Riding in the business end of a hearse or the business end of a patrol wagon might be all the same to some people; but Bill, like myself, prefers to sit up.

"What you going to do? Lock us up in a cell?" queried Bill.

"I'll say we are—in two cells," chuckled the big fellow. "And you're going to stay there for a good long time."

Bill suddenly stooped over, grabbed up the satchel of Indian oil, and, as one of his captors lunged toward him, he hurled it through the open window.

"The loot!" gasped the big fellow. "Spot the place, Joe—look out and spot the place." He turned angrily to Bill. "This won't help you none, buddy," he said grimly. "We'll get that stuff."

"You poor dumb ox," I muttered to Bill. "What in thunder did you want to toss that out of the window for? That was our ticket to liberty, that satchel filled with Indian oil. It would prove our innocence. Still," I said, struck by a happy thought, "we've got papers on us that 'll identify us—letters and receipts and—"

"Shut up!" snapped Bill.

The nearest I could figure was that his sufferings from sore feet had gone to his head.

The train was rolling into the Waterbury station.

"Call up headquarters, Joe," directed the big fellow. "Tell 'em to send the car to the station and to have one of the motorcycle men run out to where this bird tossed the bag of loot out of the window."

I was glad we didn't know anybody in Waterbury, because it would have been embarrassing to have somebody come up to shake hands with us when handshaking would have meant the rattling of nickel-plated police bracelets.

We waited in a big, airy police room while our captors modestly received the hearty congratulations of the reserves, city officials, and others. Anybody would have supposed from the reception they received that they had sandbagged a stork and picked up a couple of twins. Then finally the handcuffs were removed, and Bill and I were escorted to separate cells.

It seemed that other formalities were being delayed temporarily while the desk sergeant tried to locate the chief. If Bill and I were guilty of half the crimes that overheard remarks indicated we might be guilty of, the case certainly was too big to be handled by anybody but the chief in person.

And what got my everlasting goat was the fact that a little explanation by us and an examination of the missing satchel with its innocent contents would have saved us all this trouble and embarrassment. We were searched before they thrust us into the cells, but the papers were carefully put aside to

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await the arrival of the chief before being examined.

"Had any dinner?" asked the uniformed officer curtly as he slammed the barred door of my cell.

"Not a thing," I replied.

"We'll bring you some sandwiches and coffee," he said.

BILL'S cell was in the same corridor, twenty feet from mine, so I heard the sigh of satisfaction which he let out. The sigh was cut short, however, as the lockup official added rather unsympathetically:

"You'll need something to eat before the chief begins the third degree."

There was a sound of receding footsteps, the slamming of a distant door, and all was silent.

"Hey, Bill," I called. There was the thud of a falling shoe, so I had to repeat it. He heard me this time. "Anybody else locked up along this corridor?" I asked.

"I guess not," replied Bill cheerfully. "So far as I could see, all the other cells are empty."

"Well, you're an old-time pal of mine, and I wouldn't want anybody else to hear what I'm going to call you," I declared bitterly. "Of all the gol-dinged, raving, block-headed, idiotic—"

"Shut up; somebody's coming," interrupted Bill irritably.

The door at the end of the corridor had opened, and we heard the sound of approaching footsteps. A blue uniformed figure bulked in front of the bars.

"Here's your coffee and sandwiches," he said curtly, and opened a grating in the door to slip it through. Then he passed along to Bill's cell with another pail of coffee and bundle of sandwiches, and went out.

We were busy eating for a while. It was Bill who finally picked up the interrupted thread of conversation again.

"You were saying something just now when the officer came along," ventured Bill. "Were you referring to me?"

"Who else would I be referring to?" I demanded coldly as I tackled my second sandwich.

"Well, maybe you are ready to apologize for what you said," suggested Bill.

"Apologize?" I echoed. "Apologize for what? Do you realize that if that motorcycle cop doesn't come back with our satchel that we'll have the devil of a time proving it wasn't filled with loot?"

"We should worry," countered Bill cheerfully. "Do you realize if that motorcycle cop comes back right away with our satchel, and they find it filled with bottles of Indian oil instead of loot, and it checks up with the identifying papers they took from our pockets, that we'll be turned out of here even before we have a chance to finish our coffee and sandwiches?"

"Holy mackerel," I gasped. "So that's why you wouldn't say anything and why you tossed the satchel out of the window so as to make the cops all the more suspicious! All you were thinking of was your stomach!"

"I thought of something else, too," retorted Bill.

I waited, speechless with indignation. There was a sigh of comfort from the other cell.

"I've got my shoes and socks off; and, boy, oh boy, but these cool stones feel good to my feet!"

THE END.

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DO YOU READ DETECTIVE FICTION?

Very Well Framed

A Novelette

Riordan turned to face the woman. "We're investigatin' a murder," he said

The Case Looked Bad Enough to Captain Brady Even Before Riordan Began Paying Midnight Society Calls

By Victor Maxwell

CHAPTER I

The Body in the Road

DETECTIVE SERGEANT RIORDAN pressed a button on the edge of his desk and told the responding doorman to send Inspector Halloran in. When the department's veteran sleuth waddled his two hundred and eleven pounds of beef into the room and sank gasping into a chair, the sergeant grinned.

"Yuh big lummox," he said, "I'm goin' to save your life. Honest, yuh get so little exercise that you're outgrowin' your clothes. Well, I got some runnin' for yuh to do."

And when Riordan and Halloran get busy, the wheels begin to move to solve the complex case of the body in the road, the wrecked car, and the mysterious telephone call. Read this great novelette in DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, June 20 issue.

Read DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY—10c

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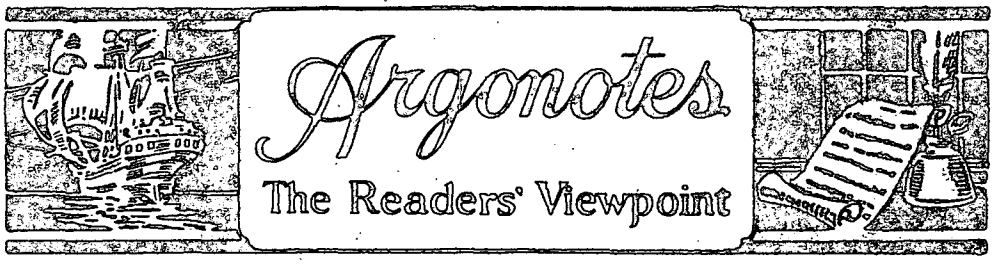

AN unusual introduction! Quite "by accident":

Kansas City, Mo.

We started reading ARGOSY several years ago; to be exact, when "Seven Footprints to Satan" began. It was a most unusual manner of introduction. The street car in which I was riding struck a Ford which suddenly darted from a side street. There was a woman in the car who was slightly injured. I sat down on the curb with her head in my lap, and fanned her with a magazine some one had thrust into my hand.

After the excitement had subsided and we started on home, I discovered I still held the magazine in my hand, and (naturally) its attractive cover prompted me to open it and I was lost! That magazine was brand new, and I often wondered if the man who had let me have it, had to buy another one.

MRS. D. L. H.

"THE Bearded Slayer" got lots of letters, such as:

Detroit, Mich.

I've just finished reading Theodore Roscoe's "The Bearded Slayer." I'd like to congratulate you, Mr. Roscoe, for writing such a marvel. It was the greatest story I've ever read or hope to read. Thanks, Mr. Roscoe, for such a thriller and may you live many long and happy years and continue to write such stories.

ARGOSY, you're worth your weight, tenfold, in gold (daggers). Again, congratulations, and keep it up! What a story! What thrills! What description!

A. R. S.

P. S. Adams's "Black Wings of Death" was also great.

Scranton, Pa.

I sure get a kick out of Roscoe's *Thibaut Corday* stories. They're weird, exciting and interesting.

Just started his "The Bearded Slayer." It's A-1 with me.

J. E. Grinstead is sure bringing his "Barons of the Border" to a thrilling conclusion. "The Battle of the Silent Men" is coming along fine.

Please don't spoil a good magazine with such trash as "The Snake Mother" and "The Radio Gun Runners." What's happened to E. S. Gardner and Loring Brent? I love to read how *Peter* gets *Susan* out of trouble.

How about a sequel or something to "Cyrano"? Just tell Robert Carse that his "Mob" hit the spot. It was short and sweet. Please give *Jimmie Cordie* and his unbeatables a vacation. Also the same to Talbot Mundy, Edgar Franklin and Kline.

HARRY W. LUTHER.

Chicago, Ill.

Being an American of French descent naturally the Foreign Legion appeals to me. It's been a good many days since I've read a story like "The Bearded Slayer."

I've read Wren, Surdez, Du So and others. But believe me, this one sure had them all beat.

H. (FRENCHY) KRAMER.

CARSE'S "Mob" gets more plaudits:

Canajoharie, N. Y.

My favorite stories are written by Fred MacIsaac, Rouse, W. Wirt, G. F. Worts, John H. Thompson, Theodore Roscoe, Robert Carse and Loring Brent.

Carse, in "Mob," made one of the most interesting stories I have ever read. "Balata" and "The Hothouse World" were great. "Sinister House" was very captivating. Brent's "The Hand of Ung" successfully made chills course up our spines.

I have been reading ARGOSY since May 31 and have enjoyed every issue except those which included "The Snake Mother."

RICHARD B. SHERIDAN.

Akron, Ohio.

"Mob," by Bob Carse, was great; let's have more stories from Bob.

By the way, whatever happened to Loring Brent and Kenneth Perkins?

A booster for ARGOSY,

HAL HADDAD.

Moline, Ill.

I do not care much for crime stories, but I thought "Mob" very good.

My favorite authors are Erle Stanley Gardner, Ralph Milne Farley, Otis Adelbert Kline, Ray

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Cummings and especially Theodore Roscoe. There's a writer for any one! Let's have some more *John Solomon* stories by H. Bedford-Jones.

JOAN PETERS.

Montreal, Que.

What I think is the best is a Western story; "Barons of the Border," for instance, is pretty exciting. Then there is the gangster story, "Mob." Boy, that sure was great! I would like to see another one like that, but to last about six weeks.

LEN. DALLISON.

ROUSSEAU'S "Vengeance Trail" arouses a desire for more R. C. M. P.:

St. Laurent, Quebec.

I have been reading the ARGOSY for more years than I can count, and I think that it is without doubt the best magazine of its kind on the market. In the March 21 issue I think that the best story was "The Vengeance Trail," by Victor Rousseau. I would like to see more stories from him, and about the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

I would not miss my copy of the ARGOSY for the world, and that is saying something.

J. D. LEMAY.

THROUGH war and peace:

Houston, Texas.

There cannot be enough praise said in reference to the ARGOSY.

For the last thirty years I have been a constant and enthusiastic reader of the same, and also wish to state that your magazine followed me all over France and occupied Germany during the troublesome years of 1917-1920. And oh, boy, what a scramble whenever the magazines arrived! After returning to the good old States again, your magazine has followed me regularly and my whole family takes delight in reading same, from my wife down to the youngest of my girls.

Give us more of W. Wirt, Fred MacIsaac, Loring Brent's *Peter the Brazen*, E. S. Gardner, and *Semi-Dual* stories, as well as the impossible stories, and you always will have a well balanced magazine. Do not forget to remember the French Foreign Legion, as well as some stories covering our own U. S. Cavalry, in either war or peace time, and you may have a satisfied reader all around.

GUSTAVE F. J. VON HOFFMANN.

EVERYDAY life stories are this reader's desire:

Norway, Me.

The fact of my having bought ARGOSY for the last ten years speaks for itself, but there is one type of story that you are depriving us of, and that is the everyday life sort such as we used to get occasionally a few years ago to offset all the excitement. Stories such as Edgar Franklin used to write, Bowman, Rath, etc. Stories where no one got killed, although we used to have some wonderful detective stories mixed in. I miss those, too.

MRS. JENNIE G. TAYLOR.

LIKES and dislikes:

Hamilton, Ontario.

I like all of your authors, but my favorites are O. A. Kline, Don Waters, Ray Cummings, Loring Brent, W. Wirt, Fred MacIsaac, George F. Worts, Bedford-Jones, John H. Thompson and E. S. Gardner.

My favorite stories were "Mob," "Black Wings of Death," "The Snake Mother," "The Planet of Peril," and "What Kept You?"

My dislikes are those guys who do all the kicking. What has happened to "The Men Who Make the ARGOSY"?

THOS. STEWART.

Detroit, Mich.

Of the stories I like, first come Western and Northern stories, then adventure, fantastic and sea stories. I do not like "I" stories and gangster stories.

Favorite authors are as follows: MacIsaac, Wirt, Worts, Grinstead, Dunn, De Polo, and Gardner.

HARVEY M. STONE.

YOU really want to see that old cockney, *John Solomon*, again? O. K.—then be sure you get our August issues:

Yonkers, N. Y.

Have just finished reading the current issue of ARGOSY and it still holds its leadership in the field. MacIsaac, Cummings, Roscoe and Erle Gardner are splendid, but when all is said and done, old *John Solomon* is my special favorite. I admire that old cockney very much. When are you going to give us another long serial of old *John?* Bedford-Jones is versatile, but the *Solomon* stories are splendid. With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

ALOYSIUS KILLACKY.

"SEVERAL brickbats," but—

Mountain View, Mo.

I like the magazine very much, but there are some things that I dislike about it. My chief dislikes are stories by Wirt and Worts. When I pick up a new ARGOSY and find a story about *Jimmie Cordie* and his band of cut-throats, I lose much of my zest for ARGOSY. About the worst story that ARGOSY ever printed, I think, is "He's My Meat!" by Wirt.

I especially like the cover illustrations by Stahr.

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The small illustrations at the beginning of each story are not so good. I like fantastic stories very much, especially "The Hothouse World." Another thing that I like about ARGOSY is that it has but few Western stories. Not that I am opposed to Westerns, but there are so many magazines that have only Western a person soon gets his fill of them. And please let the characters in the stories say "hell" instead of "heck." I think "heck" sounds awful.

Would like to see this printed, but as it contains several brick-bats I doubt very much if it will be.

R. LEE.

"VOODOO'D" is rated as the best mystery thriller of all time. (Another New Orleans mystery by Perkins is on the way.)

Adams, Mass.

My favorite author is MacIsaac, and the best stories that I have read were "The Crimson Trail," "The Silver Fang," "Planet of Peril"; and the best mystery thriller of all time, "Voodoo'd." That story sure would make a corking movie.

Tell Mr. Farley to have his characters act a little more like men and women and not so much like children.

LEONARD CROSS.

YOUR CHOICE COUPON

Editor, ARGOSY,
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

1.....

2.....

3.....

4.....

5.....

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City.....*State*.....

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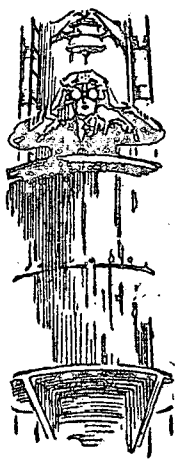
6-18



Looking Ahead!

THE GRAPEVINE MURDERS

GILLIAN HAZELTINE, greatest of criminal lawyers, faces a ruthless opponent and a baffling puzzle in this case where a rich cynic left a legacy of mystery and death.

By GEORGE F. WORTS

THE DAGGER OF DOOM

CESARE BORGIA, the poisoner and intriguer who tried to rule all medieval Italy, finds a fierce and fearless foe in the master swordsman Hugo Baldassare.

By MALCOLM WHEELER-NICHOLSON

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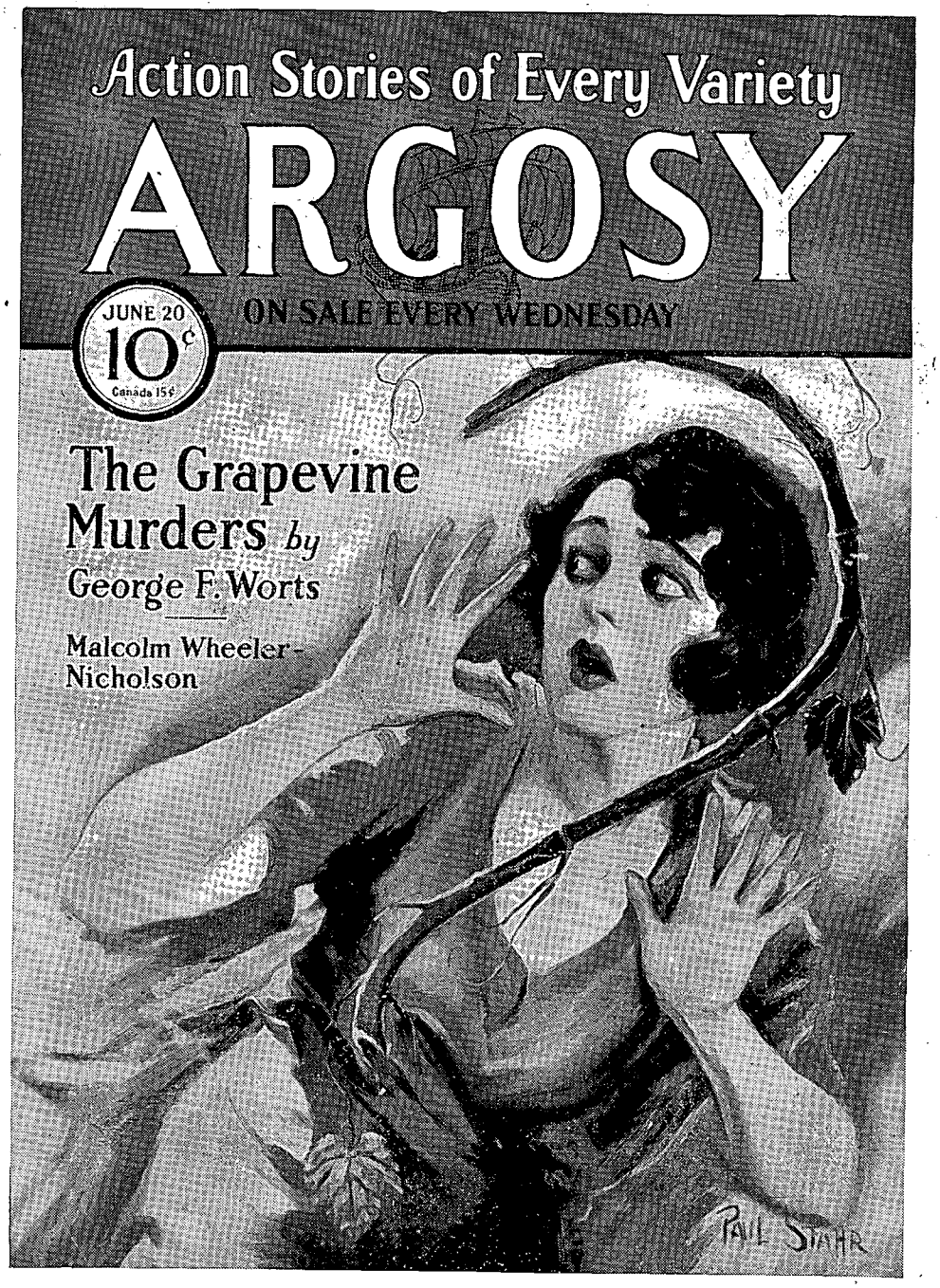

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